

IN THESE TIMES

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BLACK STRATEGIES:

a time of reassessment



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Black leadership down, but not out

By Salim Muwakkil

A coalition of black organizations is planning large anti-apartheid demonstrations at South African consulates around the country on January 15, the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. By linking King's legacy to the struggle against South African apartheid, black leaders are attempting to make explicit the moral parallels between the two.

What's more, after witnessing the success recent anti-apartheid protests have had in attracting a wide range of support, many black leaders feel these protests may help reinvigorate the moribund civil rights movement. But while apartheid presents a clear-cut moral issue, racism in the U.S. is more subtle. The domestic struggle for civil rights is a movement more in need of rigorous analysis than of moral outrage and cause celebre protests.

This discordance was recently demonstrated when Rep. Ronald Dellums (D-CA), arrested for his participation in an anti-apartheid protest, had to be moved to another cell to escape black prisoners who vociferously questioned the congressman why he wasn't getting himself arrested demonstrating for more jobs for blacks in this country. It was a question Dellums apparently had trouble answering to the prisoners' satisfaction.

The death of the 20-year alliance between the federal government and the civil rights movement—a demise signaled by Ronald Reagan's initial election and confirmed by his landslide re-election—has apparently caught much of black leadership off guard. The decline and discrediting of liberalism (an increasing body of statistics point out that black Americans gained very little during liberalism's philosophical reign) has left the civil rights establishment ideologically adrift and exposed its utter dependence on the electoral fortunes of political personalities.

Even the pioneering presidential run of the Rev. Jesse Jackson concluded as a vain gesture of political pique. Of course, the Jackson campaign was largely responsible for inspiring increased black registration and a certain amount of black pride, but in pragmatic political terms it was a bust. Although blacks voted near unanimously for Democrat Walter Mondale, it was Reagan, black leadership's targeted enemy and all-around bogeyman, who won the biggest electoral landslide in modern history. Clarence Pendleton, the chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and a black Reaganite, accused black leadership of delivering its constituents into a "political Jonestown."

But it's not only Reaganites who diagnose black leadership as politically myopic and messianic. An increasing number of former allies of the civil rights movement are advising blacks to seek approaches to their problems that are less dependent on swings in the political pendulum or moral suasion. The moral and intellectual arguments used to support various federal programs built on liberal platforms are losing their power to convince, as emerging data increasingly reveals those programs' discouraging failures.

Yet most of those who hold leadership positions in the black community are not persuaded that new approaches are necessary.

A new myth.

"We're quite familiar with the arguments being presented by the neoliberals and the neoconservatives and the neo this and the neo that," explained the Rev. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern

Black leaders see anti-apartheid protests as new sources of energy for the civil rights movement.

Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and chairman of the Black Leadership Forum. "To us, those neo-arguments are just the same old thing." He reads Reagan's re-election as an indication that "most white Americans voted without the sensitivity to the plight of the 30 to 40 million of this country's poor," and not as a need for new approaches.

"Our deliverance is not in political parties or philosophy, but in moral principles," Lowery told *In These Times*. "Although it may be temporarily unpopular for government to make a commitment to protect the rights of all citizens, particularly minorities, such a commitment is non-negotiable and eternally moral."

John Jacob, executive director of the National Urban League (NUL), contends that arguments discrediting liberal prescriptions are merely attempts to create a new myth about black status in this country. "In the past," he explained, "blatantly racist explanations of black poverty flourished. Poverty, the old myth went, was due to racial inferiority. Then the myth was refined to blame poverty on individual failings—blaming the victim. Now, there is a new myth that might be called blaming the helper. This myth says that federal programs like job training, welfare and others rob people of initiative, create dependency and prevent the black poor from competing in our economy."

"The peddlers of the new myth don't tell us how the poor and the hungry are supposed to survive without welfare and food stamps," Jacobs noted. "They don't tell us how people are supposed to become independent earners without job training programs and jobs. And they don't tell us how they are to survive without decent paychecks."

Rep. Parren Mitchell (D-MD), a long-time member of the Congressional Black Caucus and chairman of the House Committee on Small Business, charged that calls for new approaches to problems of civil rights are deceitful. "There is no other approach," Mitchell insisted. "Programs that offer a life-line to the needy, that provide job training and nutrition; programs of affirmative action and head-start education, are all programs that constantly have to be protected. These programs have never been particularly popular, and the shifts occurring in the positions of some liberals is only happening because their constituents dislike these programs. And with this country's new embrace of selfishness and 'I've got mine, jack' insensitivity, it just gets a little harder to fight for those programs, that's all. It's nothing new. But what all of these critics fail to understand is that despite the weakness within various anti-poverty programs, the fact is that many people emerged out of poverty because of those programs."

Similarly, Richard Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Ind., and vice-chair of the Democratic National Committee, said that rather than changing tactics, "the struggle for civil rights and economic justice will become even more militant during the Reagan administration's next four years."

"The Free South Africa movement has shot new energy into our struggle for justice here in America," Hatcher told *In These Times*. "You'll see an increase in militant, non-violent tactics. There'll be increased acts of civil disobedience and protest," he predicted. "An example of what's to come will be the massive demonstrations for jobs set to take place at locations all across the country on the three days leading up to Reagan's inauguration."

But while most black leaders publicly deny the need to develop new approaches (blaming the failures of liberal programs on a lack of commitment to those programs by the political establishment), there are indications that some shifts are underway.

THE STORY INSIDE

"We're using the Free South Africa movement to help bring the point home how issues of unemployment are inextricably linked to U.S. corporate connections to the South African slave-labor market," revealed Dr. Robert Starks, a spokesman for Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. "That way we can demonstrate how fighting apartheid is in the interests of the average American worker."

Although it represents no radical deviation, this concerted attempt to link interests with labor is a decided shift in emphasis. Jackson's recent trip to Europe was intended, in large part, to internationalize those links. Lowery also took pains to stress SCLC's new drive "to intensify our relationship with labor, who, after all, are natural allies in our coalition of conscience."

Starks also predicted the increasing use of a tactic generally labeled "tradism." In its contemporary application, this method was pioneered primarily by Jackson's Operation PUSH. The organization would assemble a negotiating team of distinguished black Americans that would meet with top executives of corporations doing business in the black community and argue, in effect: "You do a certain percentage of business in the black community. We want a similar percentage of the franchises, jobs and contractual services. If you don't respond fairly we may withdraw our patronage of your product." In essence, they threatened an economic boycott.

Before Jackson announced his candidacy for the presidential race, PUSH had found such success with this strategy (the group has engineered agreements with Coca-Cola Company, Heublein, Inc.—the parent company of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Smirnoff Vodka and A1 Steak Sauce—7-Up Company, Anheuser-Busch and several other companies) that it was being hailed as the new wave of the civil rights movement. Of course, this so-called new wave can hardly be called a new strategy, since it was an economic boycott of buses in Montgom-

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New councils organize the jobless

By Allen Hornblum

PHILADELPHIA

ON JANUARY 24, 1983, EDITH ALEXANDER, a 38-year-old unemployed former postal worker, believed she was about to experience the worst day of her life. Unable to make the mortgage payment on her modest West Philadelphia home, foreclosure proceedings had been successfully completed against her, and she, along with her two daughters and 15-month-old granddaughter, was about to be evicted.

Alexander was not alone in her fear of having her home seized. Between 1980 and 1982 there had been a wave of nationwide home foreclosures unparalleled since the Great Depression. In Philadelphia, for example, the number of houses the courts had foreclosed had increased almost 40 percent during those years. Throughout

vania. Their efforts led to the nation's first and most comprehensive state-funded mortgage foreclosure assistance program—a \$30 million government operation expected to save the homes of 6,000 to 8,000 economically distressed Pennsylvanians.

That unprecedented legislative accomplishment is only one of the more recent triumphs of Philadelphia's highly organized unemployed community. Since its inception in 1975, PUP has initiated several campaigns on behalf of unemployed and low-income Americans. Health care expansion, extended unemployment benefits, plant closure legislation, tax reform and job creation strategies are just a few of the areas that the state's unemployed have tackled.

And now PUP's lonely status as the nation's only organization of unemployed workers is a title of the past. Due to the nation's recent recession, the Reagan administration's budget cuts, Federal Reserve

rate, counting discouraged and underemployed workers, is 21.6 percent; in Bessemer it is 29 percent. This is intolerable to the unemployed and should be intolerable to all."

Southern Brown, an unemployed steel worker, scoffs at newspaper reports celebrating the reopening of several plants as signs of economic recovery in Alabama. "U.S. Steel has reopened to employ 2,600 instead of the 15,000 employed in 1980. Pullman-Standard reopened to employ one-tenth of its 1980 workforce, and Connors Steel now employs one-third of its 1983 level. If I'm not working and all my friends are not working, where's the recovery?" Brown asks glumly.

Another depressed economic area that has witnessed the emergence of an unemployed movement in recent years is Cleveland, Ohio. Active on a host of issues from mortgage foreclosure protection to fighting Reagan's proposal for a sub-minimum wage, the Cleveland Council of Unemployed Workers has garnered greater newspaper coverage and the respect of the local political establishment in a short time period.

"We have more than 300 paid members and a mailing list of 1,500," says Linda Watkins, a 15-year veteran of various Cleveland social service agencies who was laid off in August 1982. "We have tried to inform the general public that unemployment is still a serious problem in this country and something must be done about it." Watkins, who initiated the council soon after she lost her job, is proud that the council helped convince the local savings and loan associations to accept partial payments from unemployed workers on their home mortgages. It also successfully fought for extension of the state's unemployment compensation benefits.

Watkins is understandably proud of the council's participation in the formation of the National Unemployed Network, a coalition of unemployed committees that is run by and for the unemployed. Initiated at the behest of unemployed steel workers in the Monongahela River Valley (Mon Valley) of western Pennsylvania, the first planning meeting was held in January 1983 in Homestead, Pa. Eighty unemployed activists attended the first meeting, calling for a mass lobby in Washington to inform elected government officials of the unemployed's plight. Prior to that capitol rally, however, they knew they had to build a grassroots organization since only three unemployed committees were functioning at that point—PUP, since 1975; the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, since 1980; and the recently formed United Committee of Unemployed People in Baltimore.

Less than a month later, new committees formed in Erie and Corry, Pa.; Wheeling, W.Va.; Rochester, N.Y., and Toledo, Ohio. Because of the continued dismal pace of the economy and frenetic activity by unemployed organizers, more than 2,500 unemployed workers were bussed to the nation's capital, rallied on the Capitol steps held a mock sheriff sale of the White House, and lobbied Congress members and the Veterans Administration to establish homeowners mortgage assistance programs. Even though it was a regional coalition, the National Unemployed Network (NUN) had made its mark nationally. Not since the '30s had unemployed people organized so quickly to achieve specific goals.

Lessons learned.

During the Great Depression dislocated workers were generally slow to respond to their own and the nation's economic crisis. Just as local, state and federal governments were unprepared to react in a coordinated way, workers without jobs were also caught

in a form of economic limbo.

Even if a national relief system had existed, the unemployed, with their rugged individualist mind-set of self-sufficiency, would not have accepted it. Those able to work but unable to find jobs were blamed for many of the problems. It was not the system that had let them down, but the workers themselves who had caused the dilemma. Charity was only appropriate for the deserving poor, those who could not take care of themselves. Thus the unemployed poor, in blaming themselves for their predicament, perpetuated the government's belief that it was not obligated to aid the jobless.

Through 1930 and '31 most of those out of work suffered quietly, walking the streets looking for employment, all the while doubting their economic viability and self-worth. But as the Depression worsened, unemployment grew as industries found it increasingly difficult to operate. With larger numbers of their friends and co-workers facing similar employment and financial travail, the unemployed began to change their attitudes about the economic calamity that had befallen them. They started to realize that it wasn't they who were to blame, but the system.

Gradually, the nation's unemployed workers began to protest the economic conditions. From small towns like Henryetta, Okla., to big cities such as New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, spontaneous mass demonstrations were held with growing frequency. The unemployed demanded food, shelter and jobs.

Many of the earliest and most experienced organizers of the unemployed in the early '30s were Communists, who stressed direct action and quick victories over organization building and long-term strategy.

By the mid-'30s several rival unemployment organizations had sprung up, each claiming to best represent the interests of the nation's idle workers. Then in early 1935 several of the largest unemployed organizations formed the Workers Alliance of America. By the end of the following year, the Alliance claimed 1,600 chapters, with membership of 600,000 in 43 states.

But as unemployment councils grew in membership and strength, their credibility also grew, which meant that the government began to borrow both ideas and personnel from the movement. With President Roosevelt acceding to many of their demands in the establishment of desired New Deal programs, he hired some of the unemployed movement's best leaders and organizers. With key leadership siphoned off and required relief programs on the rise, the unemployed movement unwittingly collaborated in its own demise. The onset of World War II completed the cycle of rise, pause and decline of a national unemployed organization of the '30s.

Current unemployed organizing is different from that of the '30s in that Communists and other left sectarian groups have little, if any, role in the process. Myriad civic and neighborhood organizations are recognizing the central role of economics in their community, which explains the great interest in job retention, job creation and plant closure issues. In addition, contemporary Communists have proven to be generally poor organizers compared to their predecessors of decades past.

What's ahead.

Despite today's growing number of unemployed councils, there is a severe shortage of experienced organizers, which has often led to the demise of individual councils.

"Some of the councils that existed two years ago are not around today," says Linda Watkins. She warns unemployed workers that they shouldn't set up un-

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Unemployed and postal workers during a campaign to end mandatory overtime

Pennsylvania, the foreclosure increase was even higher.

But on that frigid January day the knowledge that thousands of other families across the nation also faced eviction was of little comfort to Alexander. As expected, several sheriff's deputies arrived for the official delivery of the eviction notice, but they were soon joined by scores of Philadelphia police. An eviction process that is normally a sad but peaceful procedure had turned into a major confrontation.

To Alexander's surprise, she was joined in her fight to keep her home by 30 unemployed strangers, all members of the Philadelphia Unemployment Project (PUP). Informed of its efforts "to save people's homes," she had attended a PUP organizing meeting less than a week before she was due to be evicted.

The Unemployment Project's strategy was simple but daring—blockade Alexander's home and force the police and sheriff's deputies into a potentially violent confrontation. PUP members circled the house, planted themselves on the porch and front lawn and held placards denouncing foreclosures and evictions.

To the authorities' dismay, the crowd on the lawn grew as neighborhood residents who came to observe the fracas quickly sided with the Alexanders. The stalemate went on for hours. Then the police suddenly got into their cars and drove away, apparently believing they were not prepared to arrest the entire neighborhood.

That victory was one of many for the Philadelphia Unemployment Project in their year-and-a-half-long battle to mitigate the mortgage foreclosure crisis in Pennsyl-

Board monetary policies and greater political sophistication on the part of the nation's growing corps of deindustrialization victims, unemployed councils are emerging throughout the U.S. More than 30 councils are currently functioning, and with the prospects of another recession on the horizon, expectations are high that new ones will quickly come on board as President Reagan moves through his second term.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the new councils are located in the Northeast and Midwest, rustbelt towns and cities that have been the frontline victims of the changing economy, foreign competition and corporat mismanagement. But councils have also sprung up in the deep South and the far West—a signal of national economic disorder and a testament to the willingness of unemployed workers to unite and then act.

For example, in Alabama, a state with perennially high unemployment, an especially active council of unemployed workers has come together. The Birmingham group has built an agenda around short-term survival issues such as utility shut-offs, mortgage foreclosures and unemployment compensation, as well as long-term systemic issues of jobs and structural unemployment.

Although far from the frostbelt, Birmingham has become a rustbelt city due to the decline of the once-formidable steel industry located there. So to members of the city's unemployed committee, the nation's recent economic recovery is only a rumor. In a statement released late last year, they argued: "The official unemployment rate in Birmingham is 12 percent; in Bessemer it is 16.1 percent. The real Birmingham

INSHORT

Sharkbite

The highly infectious character of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) makes it a disease that's susceptible to a numbers-game mentality and sometimes a manipulation of statistics to serve a cause. But AIDS researchers warn that messing with statistics doesn't lessen the threat of the disease. Their alarm was caused by an ad placed in the gay publication *Edge* by the Committee for a Responsible and Informed Gay Community in San Francisco. The group calculates the chances of contracting AIDS to be "five hundredths of 1 percent," a seemingly benign risk that they contrast with the risk of "being bitten by a shark in the middle of Santa Monica Bay." While the group's intent is admirable—taking away a psychological weapon often used by homophobes—researcher Jan Dudley of UCLA cautions that the statistics don't make any sense. The Committee based their figures on the total U.S. population—225 million. Dudley uses a base figure of 82 million—the number of males over the age of 15—and adds that, of course the likelihood of AIDS is higher in the actual risk groups. Dudley also says that the ad does a disservice by trying to assuage fears without offering good preventive advice—like the use of condoms during sex.

One man's profit

At first, Clayton Currence didn't like unions because of the people in them: "I couldn't handle the environment—the drugs, drinking, gambling and guns. I was a Christian at the time." Well, Currence is still a Christian, but now his opposition to unions has reached more sublime heights. He's now opposed to them "because they're socialistic and provide funds to support political candidates in opposition to Christian philosophy." So Currence started a group called the Christian Auto Workers—or alternately, Christians at Work—to support those religious persons who may have to work in an unfriendly pro-union environment. And so far, the West Virginian native is hard-pressed to tell how much of an effect his group has had on the labor scene—he says they do not accept donations and therefore doesn't know how many members they have. And so far conservative fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson have refused to endorse the group. But Currence has an endorsement from a much more powerful source. He quotes one of the biblical injunctions that he says supports his anti-union stand: "Religion, of course, does bring large profits, but only to those who are content with what they have. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But as long as we have food and clothing let us be content with that."

Easy come, easy go

Two of the three religious men who signed the October 7 *New York Times* ad on pluralism and abortion have formally retracted their positions, reports last week's *National Catholic Reporter*. In his retraction, Franciscan Friar Jerry Kaelin affirmed the Catholic Church's teachings on "the evils" of abortion, the arms race, capital punishment and "unemployment which results from economic decisions based solely on the motive of profit." He told *NCR* that in signing the statement his position on abortion had not changed. He had signed the statement only to call for greater church involvement in the issue. Franciscan Brother Ray McManaman of Lewis University also reportedly retracted the statement. A third religious, Marist Brother Ronald Pasquariello, said he has not yet discussed his response with his superior.

Bathroom politics

The Prudential Insurance Company in Holmdel, N.J., doesn't just threaten dismissal, it plays hardball. When Barbara Ann Keller, a new temporary employee, was caught distributing a petition objecting to the Navy's proposed base on Staten Island to house its seven-ship Surface Action Group, replete with the capability to hold nuclear warheads, Prudential security guards ousted her mid-lunch without so much as a warning. The temporary agency Keller worked for was also threatened with losing the eight-year account that they had with the insurance company. Keller, enraged that her right to free speech was so rudely violated, tells *In These Times* that Prudential had little to worry about: the employees were so scared to look at the petition in public that the only people who signed it were women visiting the ladies' room.

Top o' the heap

A few months back the *New York Times* reported that several hundred *contras* had decided to name themselves the Jeane Kirkpatrick Task Force because they "admired Mrs. Kirkpatrick for her courage." Although the *Times* concluded that it was the only guerrilla unit named for a foreigner, a source inside Nicaragua tells *In These Times* that Kirkpatrick will have to move over—a group named the Ronald Reagan Brigade has also been gearing up for attacks on the Sandinistas.

—Beth Maschinot

Readers are encouraged to send news clips, interesting reports, eye-opening memos or short articles to "In Short," c/o *In These Times*, 1300 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657. Please include your address and telephone number.



UFCW stalls support for corporate campaign

ST. PAUL—The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local P-9's plans for a corporate campaign against Hormel Company remain unsettled as the local union awaits a decision by international president William Wynn as to what support, if any, the UFCW will lend to the effort (see *In These Times*, Dec. 19, 1984).

Wynn will be making the final decision based on a December 20 recommendation by the UFCW's National Packinghouse Committee that Local P-9 forgo its planned campaign against Hormel and instead turn its attention to the "real enemy," ConAgra—owner of Armour Foods.

The Packinghouse Committee represents some 100,000 members of the UFCW in the meat-packing industry.

Local P-9 is involved in a dispute with Hormel, based in Austin, Minn., over contract changes demanded by the company that would reduce wages by 23 percent. The company claims this would bring the Austin union members' wages in line with the "national pattern" of wages in the industry. However, Local P-9

disagrees and President Jim Guyette has said that any such wage changes must be part of a negotiated agreement.

Local P-9 has hired nationally known pro-union consultant Ray Rogers to research and plan a campaign against Hormel and its financial backer, First Bank, to force Hormel into a fairer wage offer.

Workers in Austin were awaiting an arbitrator's ruling on Hormel's right to institute the wage changes before beginning a corporate campaign. Late last month the arbitrator ruled that Hormel could institute a new wage package. But he said that it should be somewhere between the \$8.25 per hour offered by Hormel and the \$10.69 per hour that was the workers' wage at the time the company instituted the cuts.

Wynn will have to consider whether the union has the resources to fight a two-front war against Armour and Hormel. Lewie Anderson, UFCW international vice president and packinghouse director, says that he sees ConAgra as the real enemy: "We do not see Hormel at this time as

our biggest threat to wages in the packinghouse industry." He said that the union intended to press a campaign against Armour, which is paying among the lowest wages in the industry.

The effect of the Packinghouse Committee recommendation on Local P-9's campaign against Hormel is uncertain. Anderson said in December that he has no doubt that Wynn will support the National Packinghouse Committee's decision. But Guyette said he does not expect the international union to oppose a corporate campaign against Hormel.

Wendell Olson, UFCW international vice president and director of Region 13 in the Twin Cities, also said he believes the UFCW will not interfere with P-9's campaign.

Guyette said last week that he would be presenting the facts to his membership and that the rank and file of the local union would decide whether to proceed with the campaign. Complicating the issue is the Austin workers' claim that Hormel made clear written promises not to cut wages when the new plant in Austin opened. The union says that Hormel has violated that agreement.

Rogers, of Corporate Campaign, Inc., has put together a thorough and ambitious plan to force Hormel into fair negotiations. Guyette said that Rogers presented this plan to the Packinghouse Committee, but only 15 minutes was allotted for the presentation with an hour-long question period following. The same presentation to the rank and file in Austin took more than two hours before questions were taken. Guyette said he feels that if the committee had had a chance to hear the plan in detail they would have been more receptive.

Meanwhile, he said, the campaign office in Austin remains open, and Rogers has been given the go-ahead to continue campaign plans which include a mass demonstration at Hormel's stockholders' meeting in Austin. Hormel has countered by announcing that the meeting has been changed to Atlanta, Ga.

Guyette said last week he does not know if Local P-9 members will attempt to attend this meeting. "They might just plan to move it someplace else," said Guyette.

He agrees that a campaign will be more difficult without support from the international, but he says he still believes that victory is possible. The local's membership have been aware from the beginning that they have to go it alone, Guyette explains. "I never led them to believe anything different."

—Drew Mendelson

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

THE MINORITY OF FRENCH FARMERS (about a third) who support the Socialist government complain that it lost its nerve before carrying through promised reforms on behalf of small farmers.

The left did keep one important promise: to introduce farmer union pluralism by giving official recognition to the smaller farmers' unions that broke away from the powerful Federation Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles (FNSEA) in protest against its favoritism toward big capitalist agriculture. On June 9, 1981, only a month after Francois Mitterrand was elected president, the newly installed left government broke the FNSEA monopoly by ruling that any organization that got at least 5 percent of the farmers' vote in elections to the Chamber of Agriculture would have the right to be represented on that consultative body.

The first pluralist elections for the Chamber of Agriculture were held Jan. 28, 1983. The FNSEA got 54.4 percent of the vote. Four other farmers' unions born of split-offs from the FNSEA won representation. One was the extreme right-wing Federation Francaise de l'Agriculture, which got 6 percent. The other three together represent the "progressive" current of farm unionism with a total of 23 percent. Each of these three progressive farm unions has its own history, as was explained to the American farm study group that visited France in November (see accompanying story).

The oldest and strongest (with 10 percent) of the three is MODEF (Movement for the defense of the family farm), which grew out of the southern French livestock raisers' long struggle against the more powerful grain growers of northern France. In the early years of the European Economic Community (EEC) or Common Market, smaller farmers, especially in the south, objected to FNSEA's concentrated defense of big grain and sugar beet producers in negotiations to establish EEC policy in Brussels. Thus MODEF was formed in 1959.

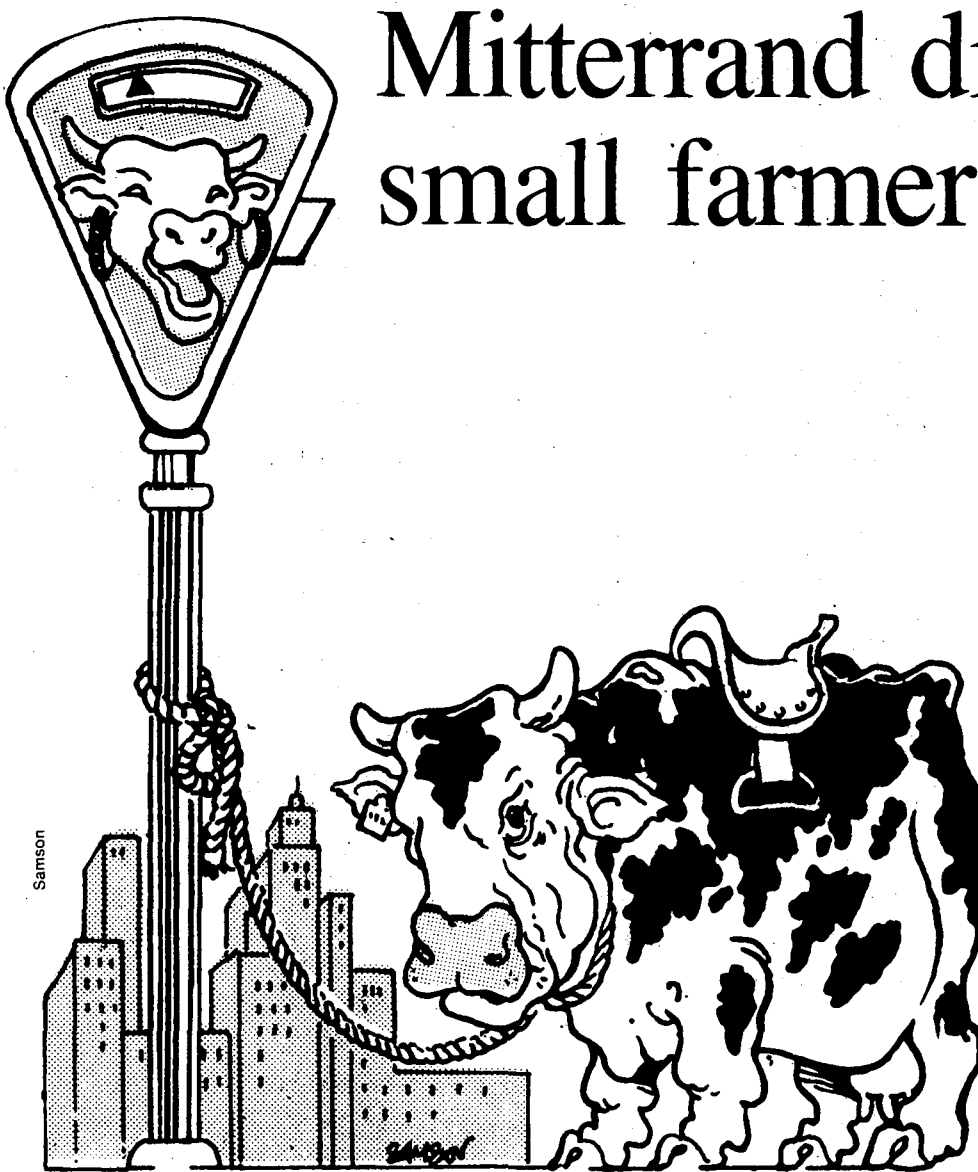
A second split to the left came in 1970, this time led by younger farmers in Brittany who had followed advice to invest heavily in their farms (mostly dairy, pigs, chickens) and who felt they'd been had when their income only declined as a result. They called themselves Paysans Travailleurs (Working Farmers) to express their conviction that farmers should be guaranteed a decent income and minimum security in return for their labor, like other working people.

"We call ourselves workers to stress the importance of work in our profession in reaction against the ideology of business," a PT spokesman explained to the visiting American study group. French farmers, he said, are now "reaching an unbearable point of debt" and facing threats of foreclosure.

The Paysans Travailleurs want a statute that will describe the status of farmers according to their labor. A Socialist member of parliament, Gerard Gouzes, is proposing such a statute that would set up a farm register where farmers could voluntarily register professional farm property separately from personal property. In case the farm goes out of business, the farmers listed as working on it—who might include the farmer and his wife as "co-managers"—would have a privileged claim to portions of the liquidation covering three to six months' income as a sort of severance pay.

The Paysans Travailleurs are resolutely *anti-productivist*. They consider that the economic crisis of the past decade has shown that productivism brings ruin rather than prosperity to farming people. They want differentiated prices according to situation, region and cost of production.

Gearing production to the world market and investing more and more heavily (and getting deeper in debt) in order to increase production for exports has made farmers more dependent while producing the huge unsold surpluses that perplex the EEC technocrats in Brussels. The "milk sea and



butter mountain" of unsold dairy products were produced thanks to massive imports of cheap, untaxed soybeans and other feeds from the U.S., and now, increasingly, from Brazil and other third world countries. The Paysans Travailleurs are in favor of producing feed grains at home. They argue that this is important for the Third World, whose proteins are being exported in the form of feed grains to fatten cattle in the rich countries while local populations starve.

In general, southern farmers feel disadvantaged by EEC policy. They are trying to resist the tendency to develop northeastern France as a highly productive area (grain and sugar beets) while turning southern France into a recreation area. Those who want to maintain farming in the south point out that it is good for the environment and for the social fabric. Abandoned by fruit growers, age-old terraces crumble and erosion mars the hillsides. Forest fires are more devastating since the departure of peasants who used to clear out the dead underbrush.

French farmers are "reaching an unbearable point of debt," and many face foreclosure.

One natural ally of the small farmers is the ecology movement.

They badly need allies since they are not very numerous. In France there are now 800,000 farms with full-time farmers, 1,200,000, counting part-time or tax-dodge farms. Farmers are only 8 percent of the working population. In the '70s, farmers on the Larzac plateau were in the forefront of left popular struggles in their struggle to stop extension of a military base on their land. Today the relative weakness of the ecological and anti-militarist movements in France deepens the small farmers' isolation.

The split between French farm unionists was deepened in the late '70s by a major battle over what to do about the "milk sea and butter mountain," the EEC dairy surpluses. The FNSEA favored financing their export through a "co-responsibility

tax" paid by all milk producers, large and small, according to the same percentage. Small dairy farmers objected strenuously. In 1977, MODEF, PT and dissidents inside the FNSEA led a big fight against the co-responsibility tax. Smaller farmers would prefer production management.

North American Farm Alliance tours Europe

In 1983, the U.S. subsidized a huge sale of American wheat flour to Egypt at well under the world market price. As all ships were taken to ship the American flour, Egypt cancelled a long-term flour purchase deal with France.

On both sides of the Atlantic, this was understood as a "warning shot" from the Reagan administration in a looming agricultural trade war with the European Economic Community (EEC). Mark Ritchie of the North American Farm Alliance (NAFA) has written that the U.S. needs to increase grain and other farm exports to offset the trade deficit caused primarily by American military presence overseas. Thus a first objective is a "dramatic increase in grain sales to Europe," but for this, European farm programs must be destroyed. The Egyptian sale was a message to Europe: "Open your markets to our grain or we will purposely undersell you in the world markets until you give in."

In November a group of American farmers, farm journalists and researchers who do not relish waging trade war with Europe went to visit Dutch and French counterparts, who also yearn for peace. The Americans on the study tour co-sponsored by the NAFA told Europeans they did not accept U.S. department of Agriculture attempts to divert them from the debt problems of American farmers by blaming European farmers. They were hosted by two European groups who also want to build friendly international understanding among farmers, the Volks Hoge School adult education center in Bergen, the Netherlands and the Federation Nationale des Syndicats Paysans in France.

In Europe, said Anoka, Minn., farmer

In the wake of the left government's recognition of pluralism, 82 local farm unionists broke away from the FNSEA in April 1982 to form the Federation Nationale des Syndicats Paysans (FNSP), the organization that hosted the American farm study tour in France. FNSP favors close cooperation with MODEF and PT. There are notable differences in style and approach, however. Whereas Paysans Travailleurs are "anti-productivist," the FNSP considers itself *post-productivist* and shows much greater concern to be modern and able to lead a much broader farm movement in the future.

Bruno Buffaria of FNSP said he had the impression that American farmers were much more solely concerned with price whereas European farmers were more concerned with income. "Income is the result of several parameters: price, financing, that is, access to credit, training and education, social protection, the organization of production," Buffaria explained. "For instance, we are currently trying to get the right to 10 days of annual leave, for vacation or study." This requires the creation of replacement teams to milk the cows, and so on. Other FNSP demands include a minimum guaranteed income and the preservation of farming in all regions of the country.

In formulating their demands, French farmers' unions are confronted with the fact that price policy is set by the EEC. But land policy can still be determined on the

Continued on page 6

Bruce Bacon, it was clear that EEC farm policy is the product of economic interests that cannot so easily be broken down. "Competing to break into the European market is a chimera that serves to keep down prices in the U.S. The American farmer is supposed to accept lower prices because he thinks he has to compete in this trade war."

In Paris, French Ministry of Agriculture official Jean Claude Trunel told the group that "the trade war has already started," despite European efforts to avoid confrontation.

"But our agriculture is so different, our prices are not going to come down to the American level," the French official said. "In Europe the limiting factor is the land. Your limiting factor is farm population. Your farming is extensive, ours is very intensive. As a general approach we cannot aim at world prices. It would be suicide for our agriculture."

European farmers' unions put much more emphasis on income (rather than just prices) and on infrastructure. "A concept like 'infrastructure' became very concrete for us," said Bacon. "We saw that farmers' unions in the business of coalition-building were also building local interest and understanding."

But this "cast a sort of despair among us, because it is hard to see where support for such changes in infrastructure can come from in the U.S." There is no political support in the cities for farmer-oriented infrastructure. Instead, urban consumer interest concentrates on prices. Changes in the U.S. were being created by the crisis itself and not from conscious political demand, according to Bacon.

—D.J.

Blacks

Continued from page 2

ery, Ala., in 1955 that actually spawned the civil rights movement.

Tradism has been criticized variously as a form of economic blackmail and as a way to further enrich the fortunes of a small black elite. In the wake of Reagan's re-election, however, it's a strategy that appears to be regaining much of its appeal.

Even some conservatives support the tactics of tradism. "It's a perfectly legitimate use of a group's economic power," said Sam Peltzman, an economics professor at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business and a well-known free-market advocate.

Another source of tradism's appeal is its very acknowledgement of economic realities. By basing their argument on the prospect that corporations will eventually boost their profits by increasing investments in the black community, tradism strategists bring something new to civil rights negotiations. Critics of the civil rights movement have long charged that its tendency to focus exclusively on the moral imperative of various wealth distribution programs has caused the movement to ignore the crucial process of wealth creation and the government's role in that process. The ideas animating tradism reverse that tendency.

The major civil rights organizations are beginning to address those long-ignored "social problems" (i.e. teenage pregnancies, fragmented families, black-on-black crime, community vandalism and decay) that plague all too many black communities. "We've allowed these problems to fester for too long before mounting an all-out assault on them," said Jacob of the Urban League. Jacob is perhaps the most outspoken member of the civil rights fraternity when calling for action on social problems. Many black leaders are still wary of publicly pushing that agenda; there remains a profound reluctance to "wash dirty laundry in public." And although this reluctance may not be as profound as it was in 1966—when President Lyndon Johnson sought to include "family stability" on the agenda of a White House Conference on Civil Rights and a group of 60 representatives from various black church and civil rights groups petitioned him to have it removed—it remains strong.

This somewhat genteel avoidance of self-criticism has often placed black leadership way out of step with its constituents. For example, crime-ridden black communities have long sought relief from the rule of thugs, while civil rights leadership busied themselves with other, more glamorous problems. Another example finds black leadership fighting long and often heroically for the cause of school busing for integration. Meanwhile, the quality of education in the inner-cities, where most blacks are educated, continues to decline at an alarming rate.

The prospect of four more Reagan years has led some blacks to counsel a turn inward. "We have to become much more self-sufficient and less dependent on factors and forces outside the black community," said Gary's Hatcher, echoing appeals that are perennially made by various black nationalist organizations.

"Most of all, we have to make greater attempts to keep our money in our own communities. Our money wakes up in the black community but goes to sleep in the white community. It's actually a colonial arrangement. Blacks are more or less forced to live together in communities that are economically controlled by whites. We simply have to do all we can to sharpen our focus on this modern form of colonialism and force it to change. How can we level a special condemnation of South Africa for perpetuating colonialism when the same thing is essentially happening here and very little is heard?" Hatcher asked. ■

France

Continued from page 5

national or local level, and this is where the smaller unions have a better chance of influencing the relationship of forces in their favor.

Land policy reforms sought by the FNSEA include establishment of "land offices" that would give small farmers priority access to available land and a "career lease"

ensuring tenant farmers of not being evicted so long as they keep up land and payments properly.

Mitterrand's first minister of agriculture, Edith Cresson, set out to put through a major farm reform incorporating many FNSEA demands, including a guaranteed income and land offices. She soon found herself at war with the FNSEA, whose leaders played on farmers' distrust of a young minister who was both a woman and a city slicker (with a degree in agronomy, however). FNSEA militants organized vigorous demonstrations against "the perfumed lady."

On March 23, 1982, the FNSEA succeeded in mobilizing 100,000 of its followers to demonstrate in Paris against Cresson's policy. As has happened in other domains, notably education, this show of strength on the part of conservative interest groups succeeded in persuading Mitterrand to back away from projected reforms. Instead of reforming farm legislation, Cresson was kicked upstairs to the less strenuous job of foreign trade minister.

One wonders with what malice Mitterrand picked his former top rival, Michel Rocard, to go in and try to calm the angry farmers as Cresson's successor. Rocard's enduring presidential ambitions are an incentive to try to please everyone—an impossible task. As current chairman of the EEC agricultural minister, Rocard must concentrate on working out compromises with France's partners in the Common Market.

Last spring, under Rocard's leadership, the EEC made a major policy shift by setting up a dairy quota system for milk. This was a step away from productivist support for surpluses toward production management, but as is often the case with compromises, nobody seems really pleased with the system. The political danger is that if the dairy quotas end up being considered a failure, the whole idea of production management risks being discredited.

The FNSEA complains that even the one promise the Socialists kept, recognition of farm union pluralism, has been watered down. Rocard has said that at the departmental level a union must have 15 percent to be represented, and even this is not being enforced in practice.

Farm policy is quite typical of the French Socialists' present plight. In the months after Mitterrand's electoral triumph, the new government announced plans for sweeping reforms, but combined an air of over-confidence with a technocratic approach that did little to build popular support. The right soon counterattacked in defense of its entrenched interests. Suddenly alarmed at the unexpectedly unfavorable balance of forces, Mitterrand backtracked.

As a result, the left's most ardent supporters feel let down. The government has entered a new phase of pushing item by item for piecemeal reforms against pressure from a right that has regained confidence. ■

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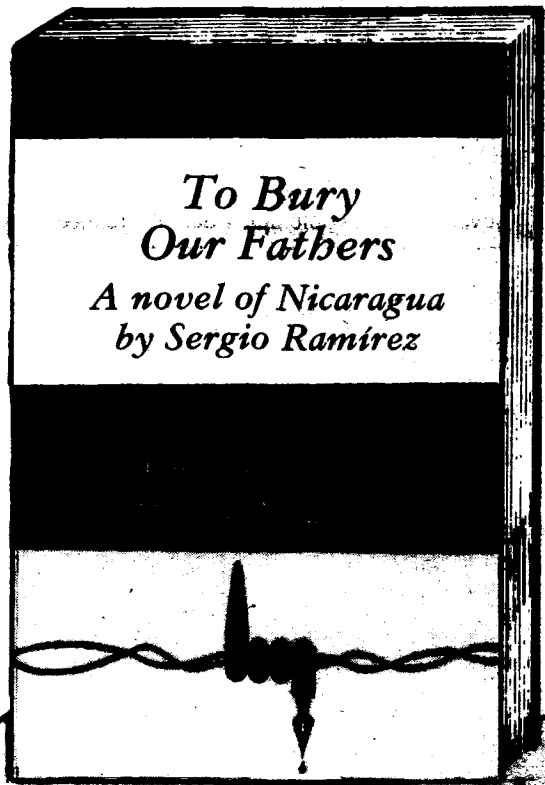
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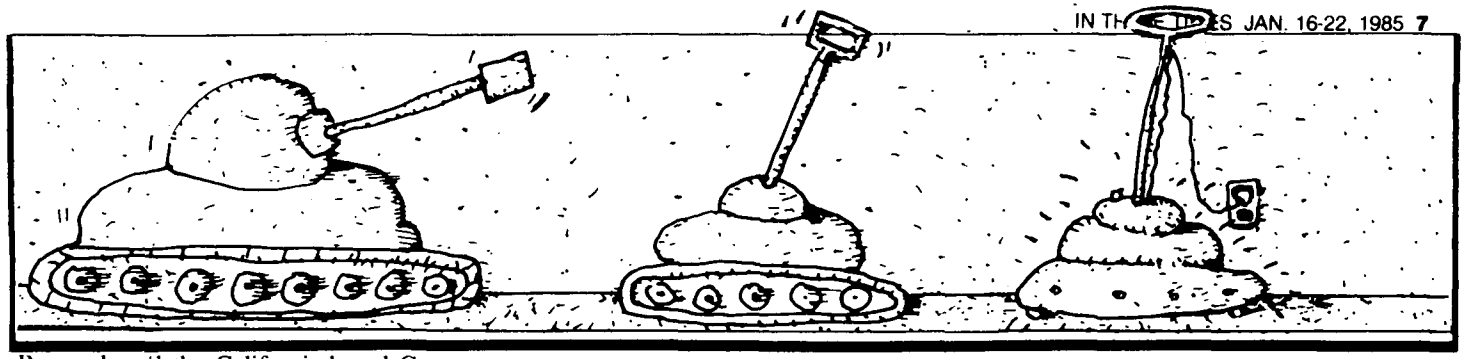
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By Joan Walsh



Research and the California-based Center for Economic Conversion, the ad hoc committee recommended commissioning a feasibility study to examine other potential uses for the plant and develop a marketing plan for its sale.

The state Commerce Department weighed in with \$20,000 toward the study. The rest of the estimated \$60,000 is expected to come from the city, the USW, community groups and perhaps even White Consolidated. The cooperation is a measure of the area's economic distress. Inland Steel and LTV are the city's major employers and layoffs have put an estimated 1,500 people out of work in the last two years.

But even once the feasibility study is funded, as all parties say it will be, keeping the plant open is another question. Blaw-Knox is old, and as White began relying on its more profitable military work it reinvested little in the facility. To renovate just one foundry for commercial work would cost \$8 million, estimates Local 1026 President Martin. "They turned away from the commercial market and put all their attention into making armor, because it had a higher profit margin," Martin says. "It's going to cost a lot of money to convert back to commercial production." Darkening the picture is the distressed state of the steel and heavy metals industries. Even if Blaw-Knox could be made competitive again, there aren't a lot of mills being built these days. Thus the feasibility study will also try to determine what new products the old plant could produce.

Despite those obstacles, East Chicago Community Development Director John Artis believes there's a "strong likelihood"

INDUSTRY

Blaw-Knox is test case for conversion

a thorough study will come up with other uses for the plant. "I'm optimistic about the potential for non-military, commercial work," Artis says, but he notes that the study will look at military production possibilities as well.

What makes Blaw-Knox an anomalous defense plant is that, once aboard the military gravy train it didn't stay there. Joel Yudken of the Center for Economic Conversion notes that White Consolidated is comparatively small, next to major defense contractors, and military production doesn't dominate its endeavors. The plant also has been the victim of more routine neglect by its corporate parent. As the steel industry declined, White apparently opted to get what it could from the existing facility, then get out of steel altogether, instead of retooling and looking for alternative commercial or military work.

But that planning vacuum has made the plant an important test case for economic conversion, which to this point has been a rather abstract concern, at least in this country. While economists warn that the defense industry is not the jobs-producer many believe it to be, people doing defense-related

work would like to hold onto their jobs, in the absence of tangible alternatives. Two years ago Yudken and other conversion proponents stepped in, at the United Auto Workers' request, when a McDonnell-Douglas plant in Long Beach, Calif., lost military contracts and laid off 14,000 people. They helped develop a plan to assemble light-rail vehicles at the plant that attracted the interest of local officials and McDonnell-Douglas management. But then came promises of contracts to build super-cargo planes for the Air Force, and the conversion plan was scuttled.

White's neglect of Blaw-Knox makes conversion more likely, Yudken notes. It also makes it more difficult. "The ability to convert the plant has certainly been hindered by the company's lack of reinvestment," says Yudken. "But this is an important battle, because it could become a model for how workers and the community can take the initiative to convert a facility and save their jobs."

To many, the only prospect grimmer than an against-the-odds battle to save Blaw-Knox is the alternative—trusting their jobs to White and the marketplace. ■

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By Jim Sleeper

JESSE JACKSON RAN TWO CAMPAIGNS during the 1984 Democratic presidential primary season, and the consequences for both American electoral politics and socialist coalition-building are problematic, especially in New York, where in some local races Jackson's appeal was rejected by as many black voters as whites.

Jackson gave white America the "Rainbow Coalition," with issue-oriented calls for jobs, peace, a clean environment and better public services. He gave blacks something remarkably different—the message that black empowerment comes before issues or coalition-building.

The idea was that only if blacks are united as a self-assertive community can they "come to the table" with demands of their own and with organized clout to withhold if the demands are not met.

The problem, according to Wesleyan sociologist Jerry Watts, who described the two Jackson campaigns at a Democratic Socialists of America conference in Philadelphia last month, was that Jackson never really specified the demands around which blacks should be rallied. He didn't educate or commit black voters to the specifics of the issues he enunciated so broadly for white audiences and at the Democratic National Convention.

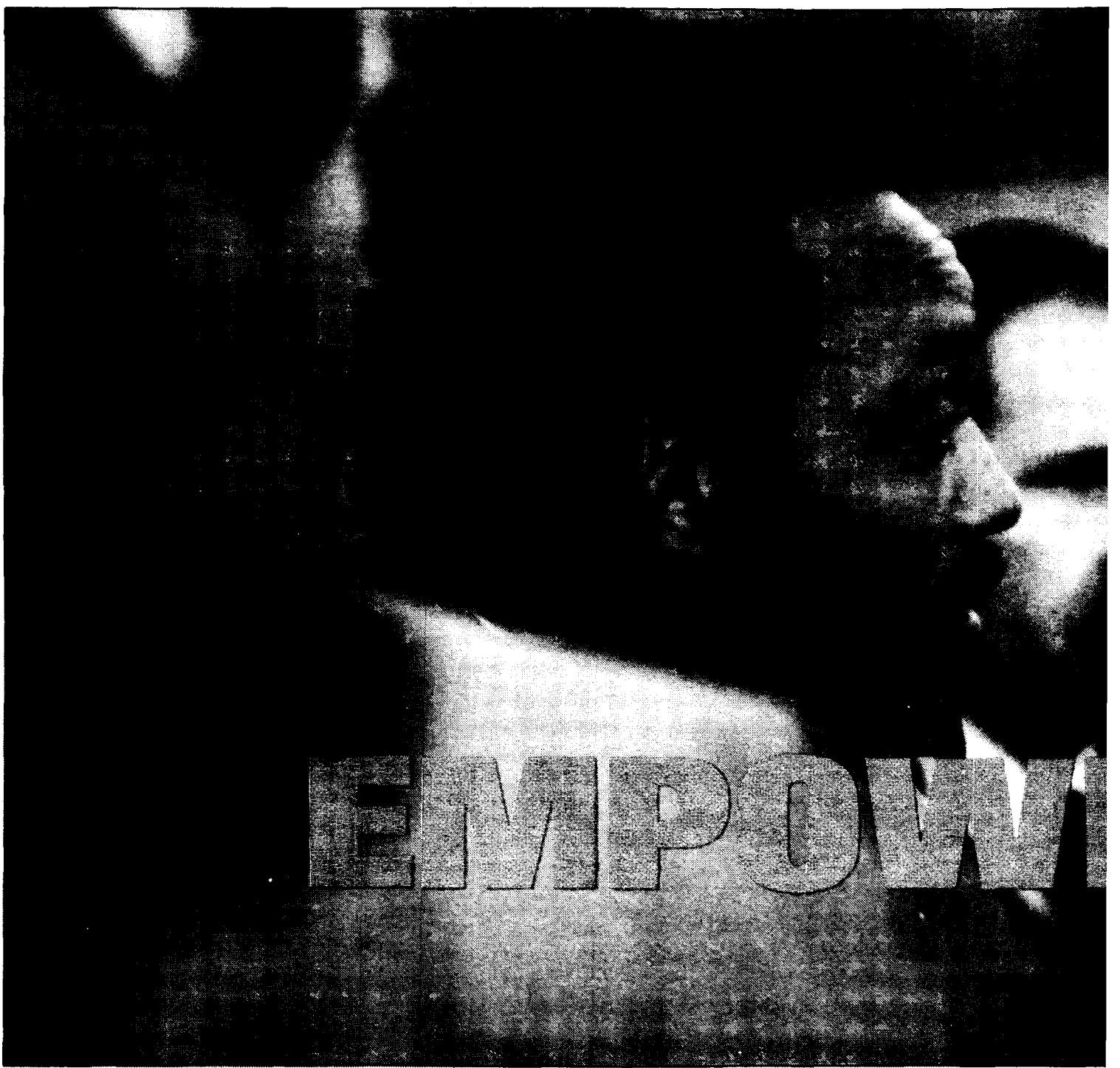
That left his "nation time" rallies short on political content; they were group exercises in therapeutic self-assertion, bonfires that failed to illuminate the larger political landscape because they generated few constructive programs for American society as a whole.

Not only did Jackson's up-front appeals for racial solidarity in the election arena violate the traditional American political culture (as would, say, a Jewish movement calling explicitly for the election of "more Jewish officials"), his appeals also violated the interests of black voters who desperately need to forge shared interracial agendas with white neighbors in local electoral districts.

The result was that Jackson's attempts to impose upon the electoral arena the paradigm of special provisions for black upward mobility sparked a white backlash at the polls. But more significantly, the strategy sparked a *black* backlash against some local black candidates running simply on appeals to racial solidarity. Black pols too canny to be mesmerized by the "our time has come" message in campaigns dependent on interracial coalitions for victory, quickly developed an attitude toward Jackson expressed best, according to Watts, by several black mayoral candidates on the eves of their elections: "Get this brother out of town."

And yet the feeling persists that blacks must be "empowered" as blacks—rather than as members of interracial unions, church bodies, neighborhood groups and issue-oriented organizations—before electoral coalitions can be built. And that feeling has a compelling basis in the history of white racism in America. Unlike Jews, for example, who suffered immeasurably in other countries but have found the U.S. to be for the most part an expansive, open society, blacks know that their oppression has been woven into the woof and warp of American life; their emancipation is therefore central to a constructive American agenda, requiring active social redress. But that knowledge has altered political discourse in urban centers in ways that ought to be challenged: they were in New York last fall.

The most widely publicized example was Rep. Joseph P. Addabbo's two-to-one win over former New York City Housing Authority Chairman Simeon Golar in a Queens district that's better than 60 percent black and where black registration had increased substantially since Golar's 45 percent showing against Addabbo in 1982. How could Golar have lost ground since 1982 despite Jackson's special campaigning in the district on his behalf?



Even more puzzling was Brooklyn state Sen. Marty Markowitz's 64 percent victory over Carl Andrews, an aide to Rep. Major Owens and a candidate of the black Coalition for Community Empowerment—in a 74 percent black district that is less than 20 percent white. And in a 65 percent black state assembly district overlapping Markowitz's, white incumbent Rhoda Jacobs handily defeated Victor Trimmer, a businessman endorsed by the black coalition, even though the challenger outspent Jacobs (he had posters and radio ads, while she had none). Jacobs took roughly half the *black* vote; Markowitz took far more than half.

Tired, cynical explanations have their kernels of truth: in Addabbo's district, though not in the others, there was an unusually large white turnout, part of a "your time *hasn't* come" backlash. And Addabbo was said to have "bribed" black clubhouse and religious leaders with attentive service delivery and promises of retirement in 1986. Some accuse Markowitz and Jacobs of similar "pay-offs" to key black leaders.

But this underestimates the sophistication of both white and black voters. Golar's share of the white vote shrank precipitously from 15 percent in 1982 to less than 3 percent in 1984 because a critical margin of whites who had voted for him in 1982 switched sides as the tone of his campaign changed.

Having come fairly close in 1982, Golar read the new black registration figures and decided to put himself over the top this time with nasty attacks on Addabbo that smacked of reverse racism; white constituents had every reason to resent the new "takeover" rhetoric.

But the real eye-opener was that Addabbo took 40 percent of the *black* vote. This had to reflect something more than the impact of testimonials from black ministers and politicians who supported Addabbo. It reflects, I think, something a good man doesn't want to hear: that even with Jesse Jackson as catalyst, and even among lower income blacks, rising voter participation is tied to aspirations that go beyond simple "black empowerment" as such, at least as it has been defined by

Jackson and others.

What kind of aspirations? The cynical answer is "bourgeois." Addabbo's district contains many middle-class black homeowners who are supposed to be trying to "pass," leaving their roots and racial loyalties behind.

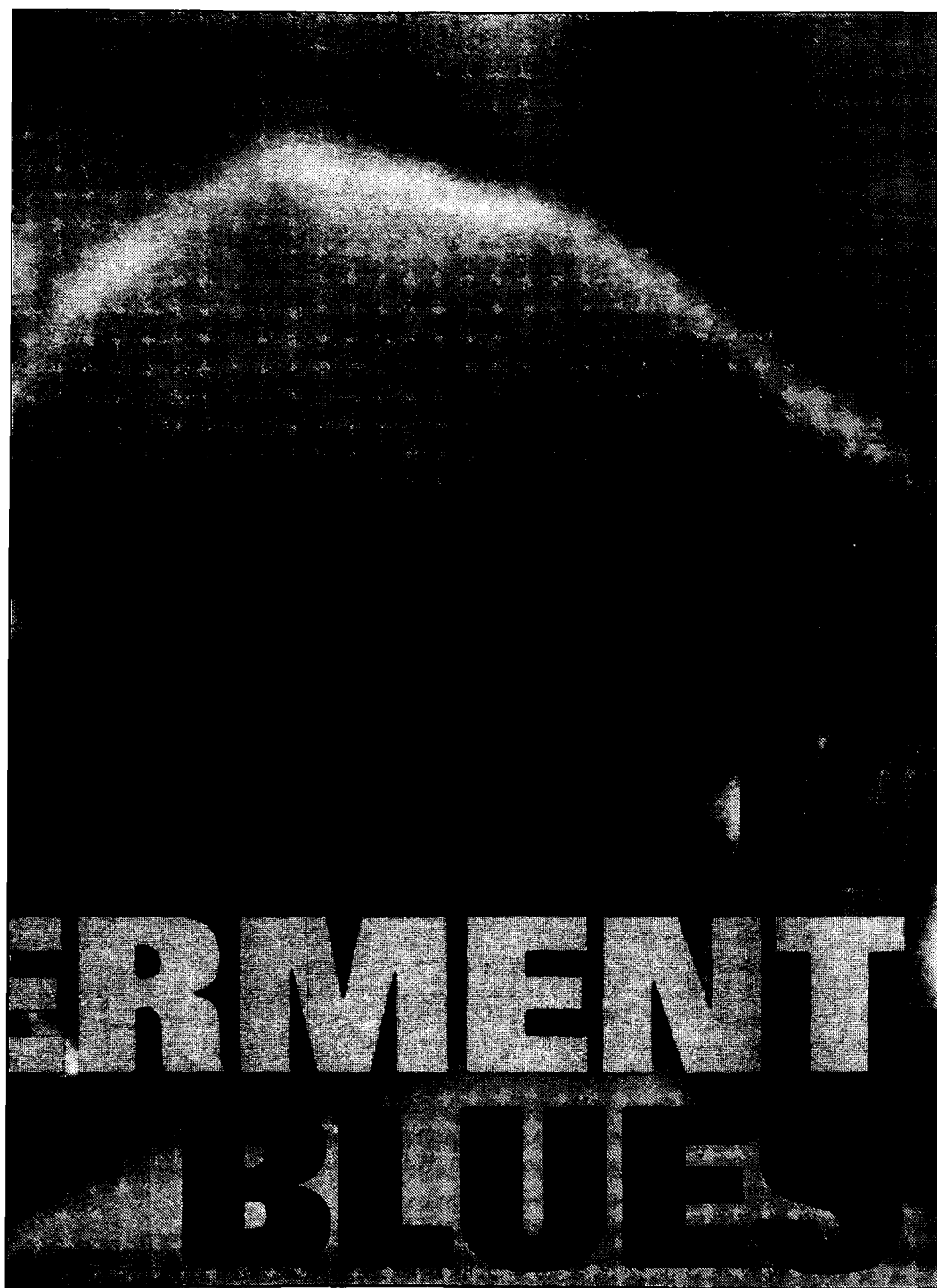
The truth, I think, is broader and more benign, as the even larger black margins won by white incumbents in the much poorer Brooklyn districts suggests. Appeals to racial solidarity only reinforce the racist dynamics of neighborhood change that many blacks are trying to combat by keeping their communities integrated.

The pattern is familiar enough: black families scrimp and save so they can move to an integrated neighborhood, only to see their arrival used by local leaders, merchants and realtors as a signal to quit the area. That sends most whites packing and recreates the ghetto conditions that blacks have tried to escape.

Redlining, block-busting, the "dumping" of welfare tenants into stable neighborhoods and other racist disinvestment tactics that play on white fears are only accelerated by black "takeover" appeals, especially by well-heeled black newcomers capitalizing on changing demographics.

Rep. Major Owens has worked with Assemblywoman Rhoda Jacobs, but in this year's electi





The point isn't to blame those "noisy" calls to racial solidarity for white racist disinvestment, whose "changing" urban neighborhoods would continue even if blacks fell silent and stepped off sidewalks to let white folks pass. The point is that there are better ways to combat racist disinvestment than through bald proclamations of black empowerment. Yet the black challengers offered little else.

Few who cling to the hot hope of black insurgency want to hear that. They blame white electoral victories on racist backlash or on the "embourgeoisement" of the black middle class. But for a black tenant

he endorsed her black opponent.



in a once-grand apartment building on a tree-lined Brooklyn street, the desire to keep the neighborhood integrated is nothing of the kind. More simply, most blacks who move to "changing" neighborhoods aren't looking for racial solidarity; they just want to share in the larger American society.

In the Addabbo, Markowitz and Jacobs races, many blacks in effect declared that when an effective white incumbent stands against white flight and disinvestment by affirming his or her longtime neighborhood roots and by reaching out across racial lines, their prospects are better. Not only is that impulse benign; it's a promising beginning for interracial, grassroots empowerment against neighborhood decay.

The point was amusingly underscored by Markowitz during a debate before a black election-eve audience in 1982. His opponent quipped, "One candidate is white; I'm the candidate that's right." When his turn came, Markowitz bounded up to the mike and cried, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am the white candidate," bowing deeply and bringing down the house. "If I don't deliver, throw me the hell out!" A majority of the black voters decided not to.

I don't think Addabbo or Jacobs are the best natural leaders for interracial neighborhood coalitions. But their victories underscored the potential and the yearning for such coalitions among black voters. And, sadly, the victories reflect the fact that, with the partial exception of Golar, who submerged his true ability in negative campaigning, none of the black challengers spoke to that yearning.

Indeed, the independent black weekly newspaper *The City Sun* declined to back Golar's or Markowitz' opponent, preferring to remain neutral. And *The Sun* endorsed Jacobs outright, shocking black politicians and activists in the Jackson mold who had argued that demography is destiny and that black electoral empowerment is good whether coalition-oriented or not, represented by qualified candidates or not.

I've been oversimplifying in order to make my points; Rep. Major Owens, perhaps the most thoughtful exponent of the black em-

powerment view in New York City, re-introduces the historical complexity. He endorsed the three black challengers, arguing in part that, whatever their limitations, they would become part of an effective political team—the Coalition for Community Empowerment, headed by Assemblyman Al Vann, Jackson's New York campaign manager.

"I have to look at the fact that only 1 percent of the elected officials in America are black," Owens told a largely white audience last month in the context of a discussion about quotas. "I'm not saying I'm comfortable with the idea that the moment a district becomes 51 percent black, its elected officials should be black. But I ask how often does a black get to represent a mostly-white district—how often does an elected official from any ethnic group get to represent a district whose residents are overwhelmingly from a different ethnic group."

Owens noted that, given the reality of higher white voter turnout in most localities, few minority candidates can hope to win elections in any but the most overwhelmingly minority districts if they rely on exclusionary, reverse-racist appeals. But, again, he sees a real double standard in the fact that white candidates like Mayor Ed Koch do get elected while relying on the politics of exclusion. Before whites get too prissy about the supposed hostility of "black empowerment" candidates, Owens says, they ought to agree that "no politician who writes off any group should be able to get elected."

These arguments, some of which Owens bases on the need to redress past injustices, are compelling correctives to the often facile white condemnation of black electoral empowerment. They're reminiscent of a 1981 comment of *City Sun* editor Andrew Cooper: "We've learned simply that we have to solidify the black community electorally so that we can reward our friends and punish our enemies peacefully, like every other group in America. Without that, people will never respect you and you won't get a penny. With it, you can talk about coalitions and progressive efforts."

Yet Cooper endorsed Jacobs this year, and declined to endorse Addabbo's and Markowitz' opponents, perhaps because these three white incumbents fell into the category of "our friends" and deserved some reward, while their black challengers had unclear track records and intentions.

Political scientist Jim Chapin cautions against the "myth of machine empowerment" that attaches to groups like Vann's even after they've settled for malleable "team players" as candidates and officeholders. The Irish, who practiced such "machine empowerment" to the hilt, actually rose up the mobility ladder slower than other white ethnic groups, while Jews in New York, who were far more successful economically, didn't get around to electing a mayor of "their own"—Abe Beam—until 1973. Similarly, the growing Asian community in New York City, much of it impoverished and working in sweatshops and restaurants, seems less intent on electing its own members to public office than in empowering itself entrepreneurially and professionally.

But that only highlights the unique nature of black oppression, and the consequent black reliance on government to ameliorate and redress the devastating social effects of pervasive and routine racism. Ultimately Owens' call for more black political representation will have to be weighed against the dangers of uncritical appeals to racial solidarity. The call for black empowerment opens up fundamental questions about our political economy, which has undergirded the entrepreneurial and professional success of some at the expense of others.

If black leaders move beyond Jackson's charisma to raise those fundamental questions in issue-agendas that other minorities and whites can join, then "black empowerment" will prove to have been an important transitional step toward interracial coalition-building and a boon to the society as a whole. But for now, rhetoric of uncritical racial solidarity has altered New

York City's political discourse in ways that make it more difficult for the broad spectrum of Ed Koch's opponents to unite this year behind a single candidate—who probably won't be black.

There is also an implicit challenge to those on the left who've given Jackson and his local black adherents uncritical support. Blacks' hold on the American radical imagination is profound, and rightly so; indeed, because blacks have been excluded from white society's routine, subtle corruptions, white Americans often expect them to come to public life as a kind of social and cultural salvation, a reservoir of special perception and feeling tapped in the searing moral vision of a Martin Luther King. Some blacks, like King and Malcolm X, have presented themselves on just such terms, brilliantly, redemptively.

But to see blacks becoming burghers in Queens and even mayors in city halls, settling down to the day-to-day business of running municipalities, can be disappointing to those who hold out for the hot hope of a redemptive, perhaps revolutionary movement.

There is another model of empowerment for blacks to ponder: in the devastated Brooklyn neighborhoods of Brownsville and East New York, 42 black, white and Hispanic churches have banded together to form East Brooklyn Churches, a "power organization" trained by the Industrial Areas Foundation along lines familiar to residents of Chicago, southern Texas and other areas. Among its many impressive accomplishments, EBC registered and turned out 10,000 new voters last year, doubling the returns from its corner of the world and raising politicians' eyebrows all over the city.

The new voters were 70 percent black, but EBC mobilized them without ever using the words "black agenda" or "black empowerment," believing as it does in the interracial empowerment of all low-income people. "Our only 'agenda' is closing 'smoke' shops, cleaning up local food stores, parks and vacant lots, putting up housing and getting jobs," an EBC spokesperson says. EBC assumes that blacks want to be joined and included in those efforts, and that low-income communities, like unions, must organize interracially from the start.

The group takes the same attitude toward local elected officials: accountability is more important than race. When a *Daily News* reporter tried after the recent presidential election to pigeonhole EBC's turnout as part of the 1985 anti-Koch black vote, a black EBC spokesperson told him firmly that the group is in nobody's corner. Instead of attacking Koch, EBC has gotten him to deliver on its housing and other programs. That doesn't mean EBC members will support him; it does mean his challengers can take nothing for granted, and will win support only on their own merits.

By avoiding explicitly racial appeals, EBC keeps whites comfortably in its coalition. By doing that, it stops Ed Koch's divisive rhetoric—indeed, commands his respect. And by doing that, EBC has left even racist whites unsure about what to oppose. Indeed, as EBC's power grows, even hostile whites are finding that cooperation makes sense, particularly since there are already white role-models in the coalition for them to follow.

"We're changing our name, from 'no-account' to 'people who have to be counted,' from 'welfare people' to 'powerful, organized people,'" the Rev. Orlando Covington told a charged audience at EBC's pre-election rally last October. Beside Covington, who is black, stood the rally's chairman, the Rev. Brendan Buckley, a white priest. A thousand blacks, Hispanics and whites leaped to their feet and cheered.

It was what Jesse Jackson's "Rainbow" rallies were meant to be.

Jim Sleeper has written for the *Village Voice*, the *New York Times* and the *City Sun*. He has done volunteer work for Rep. Major Owens and Assemblywoman Rhoda Jacobs.

LETTERS

In These Times is an independent newspaper committed to democratic pluralism and to helping build a popular movement for socialism in the United States. Our pages are open to a wide range of views on the left, both socialist and non-socialist. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

CYPRUS

DIANA JOHNSTONE'S ARTICLE, "A GREEK mystery: will U.S. pull out military by 1988?" (ITT, Dec. 19) is a good review of U.S.-Greek relations, but Johnstone errs in some comments about Cyprus.

If the Turkish Cypriot administration "has given the U.S. permission to establish [an RDF] base" in the occupied area, as she writes, such permission is of too recent origin to be the reason why the U.S. "let Turkey grab 38 percent of an island." It was more than 10 years ago that the U.S. condoned Turkey's invasion, and the U.S. wasn't looking for an RDF base then. The request for an RDF base was first made in 1982, and Denktash reportedly refused.

Nor does the U.S. have "a long-standing...policy of keeping Cyprus split from Greece." Union with Greece would make Cyprus part of NATO and eligible for NATO (U.S.) bases. The U.S. actively supported union of Cyprus with Greece in the '60s—at the cost to Cyprus of a military base for Turkey and two Turkish Cypriot enclaves. This was unacceptable to President Makarios. The American proposal was known overtly as the Acheson plan. It was also pursued covertly by George Ball in secret meetings in 1964 with rightwing Greek Cypriot extremists who were willing to pay the price (these contacts were admiringly described by Weintal and Bartlett in *Facing the Brink*, 1967). George Ball was quite candid about the goals of American policy toward Cyprus in his memoirs, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 342:

"Viewed from Washington, the issues were clear enough. Cyprus was a strategically important piece of real estate at issue between two NATO partners: Greece and Turkey. We needed to keep in under NATO control."

The apparent inconsistencies of Kissinger's 1974 Cyprus policy (such as taking the risk of offending Turkey by condoning the Greek junta coup) disappear when

considered in the light of earlier American policy and the report from the Athens CIA station that the head of the Greek junta "had received what he regarded as assurances from Turkish military officials that they would not react" to the coup against Makarios. Too many decisionmakers in 1974 seemed to think that Makarios was the only obstacle to a Greek-Turk solution for Cyprus.

—Meredith Royce
McLean, Va.

OXFAM IN ERITREA

DAVID KLINE (ITT, OCT. 17) IS GUILTY OF a false assertion when he states in "Eritrea's famine is politically sticky" that our agency has refused to aid Eritrea, in northern Ethiopia. In fact, Oxfam America has been supplying famine-relief assistance to Eritrea for the past several years. Our first grant was in 1977. In the last fiscal year, roughly half our emergency aid to Ethiopia went to Eritrea and Tigray. Among our most recent grants, for example, is \$40,000 for immediate food and transport purchases for drought-affected areas of Eritrea.

Overall, Oxfam America, a non-profit, non-sectarian agency, is funding development and relief projects in 14 African countries. The implication that our program is conditioned on "Cold War" considerations is patently absurd. But it's worth pointing out, for example, that we fund projects in Somalia as well as in "pro-Soviet" Ethiopia.

Finally, a point of clarification: Oxfam America is an autonomous agency, but we cooperate frequently with our sister organization, OXFAM in Great Britain. OXFAM, too, is providing emergency aid to all areas of Ethiopia most severely affected by drought, including Eritrea and Tigray.

John C. Hammock
Executive Director, OXFAM America
Boston

David Kline replies: I'm happy to correct the record. According to details provided by Oxfam, one-half of their fiscal 1984 budget for emergency aid to Ethiopia was sent, via the Sudan, to rebel-held areas in Ethiopia. Specifically, aid was given to the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigray. These are the only channels through which the half of starving Ethiopia that lives in the rebellious provinces can be reached. I apologize for the error.

ISRAEL-PLO

THANKS FOR THE JOHN EGAN INTERVIEW with Matti Peled, the Israeli peace leader (ITT, Dec. 19).

For nitpickers, perhaps the statement that "the Progressive List for Peace evoked out of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (ICIPP)" could be clarified.

The Progressive List for Peace is a combined electoral list drawn from a number of Jewish and Arab groups in Israel. Many PLP supporters had no connection with ICIPP, a small non-profit organization devoted to resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through direct communication between Israelis and Palestinians. And not all ICIPP members supported the PLP in the Israeli election last July.

In the United States, our own American-Israel Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace attempts to present the position of those Israelis who, like Peled, believe that Israeli-PLO negotiations would serve the best interests of Israel. Interested readers can contact us at 4816 Cornell Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60515.

—Mary Appelman
Chair, American-Israel Council
Downers Grove, Ill.

TOXIC WASTE

RICHARD ASINOF'S ARTICLE ON THE Bhopal chemical tragedy was excellent. But there are two aspects of the chemical waste problem he ignored.

First, the world chemical industry that produced the Bhopal disaster is still emerging from a terrible economic crisis. The crisis, as reported in all the major business journals, stems largely from the classic causes of recession—industry overproduction and overcapacity, and resulting market gluts that depress chemical profits. Chemical makers have responded to this with classic counter-measures—i.e. mergers, plant closures and layoffs. Therefore, any future campaign for "corporate responsibility" by chemical producers will probably be met by cries of poverty. Already the industry has successfully cited the world chemical crisis and America's alleged need to stay "competitive" in glutted international markets as reasons for not renewing the Superfund program in 1984. Furor over Bhopal may weaken such arguments, but we can probably expect similar crisis-based objections

in 1985.

Second, many chemical companies have reacted to the industry's glut of "commodity chemicals" by moving into specialty chemical products (e.g. new pesticides) and investing in new technologies (e.g. genetic engineering). Therefore, there is a fair chance that the chemical makers, after using the crisis as an argument against regulation, will be enthusiastically diversifying into unregulated fields of business by the time we enact strong "right to know" and Superfund laws. We should start investigating now whether by doing so they will also escape liability for the billions of tons of toxic wastes they have already bequeathed to society.

Asinof's program of reforms deserves strong support from the left, but it also needs a little socialist backbone. Somehow, we need to enact social controls over chemical industry investment and disinvestment if we are to safeguard the effectiveness of the "right to know" laws, workplace safety measures, and other reforms the anti-toxics movement is advocating. Without investment controls, these reforms may be sidestepped by an industry that already bases its profits on its mastery of rapid technological and economic change.

—Andy Feeney
Washington, D.C.

CHILDREN

NOT SINCE THE AMERICAN INTRUSION into Vietnam have so many religious groups gathered to protest our bad treatment of the children of Central America. On December 28 religious people came to protest and give witness to the protesters on the upper walk of the downtown Los Angeles Federal Building. This action commemorated the day remembered as the Feast of the Innocents. "...Rachel weeping for her children...because they were no more." (Matthew 2:16-18)

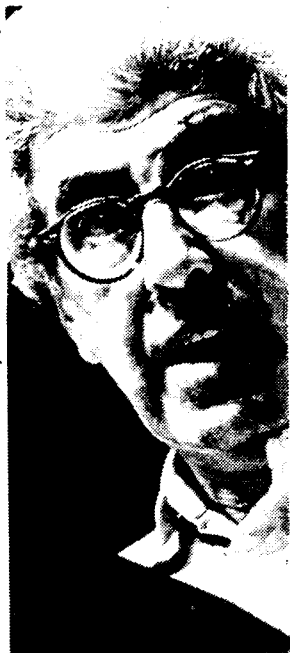
On the initiative of the Catholic Worker more than 60 people came to give witness as 26 courageous supplicants knelt, stood, prayed and petitioned their government to stop mistreating the children of Central America. It is illegal to protest on U.S. property and several petitioners who prayed were later arrested, including two from the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles: Teresa Sanchez, who also belongs to the U.S.-Nicaragua People to People Committee, and our minister the Rev. Philip Zwerling.

—David Seidman
Los Angeles

CORRECTION

Due to an editing error in "The Art That Came in from the Cold War" (ITT, Jan. 9), two lines were included in the article that should have been omitted. The exhibition that included many works from "Advancing American Art" has closed and cannot be seen this year at the Terra Museum in Evanston.

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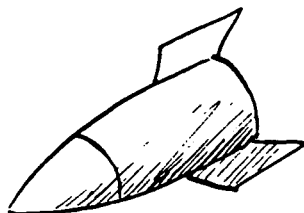
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DIALOG

Green analog may be growing in U.S.*Green politics is not like the New Left of the '60s*

By Charlene Spretnak

DIANA JOHNSTONE'S REVIEW of *Green Politics* (ITT, Oct. 17, 1984) misrepresented several points. She claimed we fail to acknowledge the positive contribution of those Greens who came from Marxist circles, but on page 21 we state that the large number of Greens from the "nondogmatic left," as the Germans call it, are completely integrated into the party and work hard for Green ideals. It is only the numerically small group-Z Greens (from the "dogmatic left," mainly in Hamburg) who were felt by many Greens all over West Germany to be problematic in the summer of 1983, when the interviews were conducted. (In our book I mentioned the opposition of the "fundamentalists" vs. the "realists," who favor a coalition with the Social Democrats. After our manuscript was finished, this set of alignments became the overshadowing one in the party, with the Group-Z people and the visionary/holistic people now strange bedfellows as the "fundis.")

In her treatment of my American chapter, Johnstone selected only one of the several possible forms suggested for an American Green movement (caucuses) and claimed that to be our entire approach. Regarding my suggestions of Green positions on U.S. policy questions, she reported the opposite of what I actually observe about Reagan's games in Geneva. I point out that no administration has any intention of making arms control proposals that would shut down the fat defense industries and send their two million workers onto the unemployment

rolls. My point in that section is the importance of conversion plans and the necessity to incorporate Green insights into those plans. Finally, because I criticize the typically "bad process" within many parts of the West German Green Party on feminist and other grounds developed in the peace movement, Johnstone concludes that we want only a "tranquil" politics. That, once again, is ridiculous.

Several West German Greens told me during my research that anyone writing

honestly about the ideals and internal process of the Greens had better be prepared for attacks by the right and the left. That is what has happened. The same day I read Johnstone's review someone sent me a newsletter from a conservative institute, the entire issue of which analyzed our book as irrefutable proof of a pending worldwide takeover by the "eco-feminist order," which will destroy the family, private property—and urban civilization! Leftist reviewers have portrayed us as rightwing ideologues and never mention in their reviews the distinctions we make in our book between the "dogmatic" and "nondogmatic" German left and between "anti-Marxist" and "post-Marxist." I suppose we've become targets because we were the first to bring across the Atlantic the news that Green politics is different from New Left

In Germany, the Green Party has steadily been gaining strength. It has now inspired efforts in this country to create a left alternative politics.

politics. Our reportage has been judged "an important synthesis and an excellent analysis" by August Haussleiter, a co-founder of the West German Greens who often defends the Group-Z people.

Many Americans from what the Germans would call a "nondogmatic left" background now work in Green organizations such as the Committees of Correspondence, P.O. Box 40040, St. Paul, Minn. 55104, (which Harry Boyte, myself and others co-founded); the Citizens Party; and the North American Green Party (the reincarnated Yippies).

*Charlene Spretnak is co-author with Fritjof Capra of *Green Politics*.*

New political effort seeks a fusion of "Green" and "populist" themes

By Harry C. Boyte

TWO THEMES ARE IN THE AIR on the American left this fall: the successes of the "Green" parties in Europe have led to speculation about the possibilities of some analogous political force developing here. Simultaneously, as several commentators have observed, "the new populism" of the Congressional Populist Caucus and new Democratic senators emerged from the elections as perhaps the strongest alternative to Reaganism and of those who would move the Democratic Party sharply rightward.

In recent months, a new organizing effort called the Committees of Correspondence has begun to seek a fusion of "Green" and "Populist" themes. The Committees aim at majoritarian political appeal. The effort grows from and seeks to express the values and aspirations of the rich, broad organizing efforts of recent years—the thousands of neighborhood and citizen groups, women's self-help projects, environmental and peace organizations, rural protests and the like.

An Ecological Perspective.

In her review (ITT, Oct. 17, 1984) of *Green Politics*, the book by Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra that introduces European Green ideas to an American audience and

points to similar possibilities here, Diana Johnstone raises some of the difficulties facing a new movement and also argues for an approach that a new movement must overcome. On the whole, Johnstone is sharply critical of the book. She credits the authors with providing a "great deal of information about the Greens apparently unavailable elsewhere in the U.S." But she suggests that their "Dick and Jane level of political theory" ignores the role of Marxism specifically and political conflict generally in shaping the German Greens and is mired in hopeless idealism: "They seem to believe that this new ideal [a decentralist world] is on its way because it is being imagined."

Issues of power, class injustice and social conflict—while not ignored by Capra and Spretnak—must indeed inform any serious political challenge to the megastructure of the modern world. And there is no simple format for combining such concerns with the sort of middle-class environmental, feminist and peace groups most immediately attracted to "Green politics," especially as it has been portrayed (often

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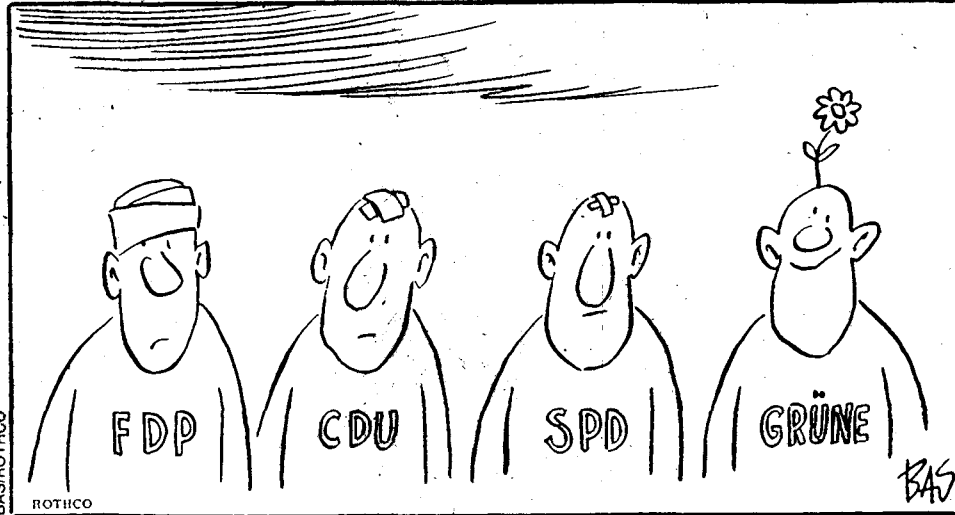
DIALOG

Continued from preceding page

incorrectly) in the United States. But Johnstone's own prescriptions are simply a formula for political isolation and marginality. In place of Spretnak and Capra's stress on the need for a new ecologically based paradigm, she prefers a left-wing grouping in ecological trappings, based on elements like "The Citizens Party, Third World support groups, radical Catholics and nondogmatic Marxists."

Johnstone excoriates Spretnak and Capra for imagining that one could draw into a new American political movement ordinary "Democrats and Republicans." But precisely the conviction that an ecological perspective allows a way to think about politics—and appeal to diverse groups—across traditional political boundaries furnishes the creative, driving theme of *Green Politics* and the Green political movements, alike. In part, the appeal is immediate and concrete: West German "value conservatives" in rural areas, like young, middle-class professionals, are passionately disturbed by the degradation of the natural world as the price of "progress," conventionally understood. And the concern is far deeper than simply an environmental aesthetic. The destruction of ancient areas like the Black Forest threatens the spiritual and folk cultural wellsprings of Germany, the German people's intricate web of connections with the land and with other life that defines the best of their historical identity. Moreover, the social counterparts of such a concern—proposals for community-based economic life and technology, decentralization of power, an ethic of nonviolence, for example—suggest themes historically characteristic of democratic populist movements.

There are evident differences in "Green" and "Populist" approaches. The one begins with the estrangement of humans from the natural world, the other with the alienation of the individual from human community and historical identities; "Green politics" finds its most immediate constituency in middle-class, technical and professional groups, Populism in poor,



working-class and minority areas. But both share an organic conception of politics and political action that creates broad areas of value agreement. Moreover, while the German Greens, in the aftermath of fascism's vulgar appropriation of "populist themes" like family, folk culture, spirituality and ties to the land, have been hesitant about developing their full symbolic and communicative potentials, an American movement begins with strikingly different possibilities: we now have an enormous wealth of organizing experiences and social historical work, alike, that furnish solid foundations for developing a democratic and ecological populism, interweaving concepts of community and grassroots democracy with values of sustainability, feminism, love of the land and peace.

The new populism.

"Populism," of course, is a term with many and diverse meanings, especially in this most historically forgetful of societies. Many on the right have taken up the term—Richard Viguerie's recent book *The Establishment vs. the People* calls for a "conservative populist party." And in the Democratic orbit, "populism" can mean simply a new rhetorical packaging for proposals like tax reform. Yet it also has deeper, more transformative resonances.

Understood not mainly as a particular rhetorical pose or specific "issue agenda,"

Populism suggests an approach grounded in the living fabric of human relationships, says Boyte.

populism suggests an approach grounded in the living fabric of human relationships—the organic, continuous and historical identities of communities that move into action to control the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. Populism—while always raising issues, struggling about power, challenging existing structures—is thus, ultimately, about values and cultural meanings. It occupies a different sort of space than conventional politics in the modern world—including the politics of the left, which protests the demise of settled communities even while it assumes their progressive replacement with abstract forms of association. The difference in strategic orientations of populism and the left helps clarify the distinction: the conventional left looks mainly for its support to settings where people have sundered their "roots"—mass organizations, mass parties and the like. Populist politics, on the other hand, draws its power and vision from institutions embedded in the fabric of community life like churches, synagogues, neighborhood groups, PTAs and ethnic clubs.

The savage assault on all forms of historical identity and communal ties that characterizes contemporary American capitalism—with its mass culture, cycles of boom and bust, multinational flows of capital and

enormous bureaucratic state apparatus—is the force that generates the new populist impulse. In response, much of populist organizing has a defensive and embattled quality. But there is also a rich body of experience that reinforces historical lessons from civil rights, labor, women's and other democratic movements: a "value-based approach," combining substantive discussions of diverse cultural traditions and values with effective and skilled work on particular issues, furnishes a kind of "schooling in citizenship." Through such experiences ordinary people can gain new experiences of power, dignity and self-respect, skills of public life and democratic values.

The effort to combine "Green" or ecological perspectives with populist ones is challenging, but the early experience of the Committees of Correspondence suggests great possibilities. A planning meeting last August in St. Paul, Minn., partly inspired by the book *Green Politics*, brought together several environmental leaders, peace activists, feminists and futurists with community organizers, leaders in church networks, people from farming regions and the like. The flood of correspondence that has come into the national communications office in the Twin Cities has been diverse. And the areas where local chapters have already organized have made promising progress toward bridging conventional political labels. (P.O. Box 40040, St. Paul, MN 55104; \$15 enlists one as a "Founding Correspondent," entitled to regular mailings and discussion bulletins leading up to the founding meeting.)

Many issues are unresolved: though many of us also respect the idealism and pioneering energy of groups like the Citizens Party, most do not feel a "third party" will be most promising for broad, majoritarian political organizing. But the precise relationship between electoral involvement, educational campaigns and other forms of grassroots organizing can only be resolved through much discussion. Similarly, the ways a new political movement organization can create a vital democratic structure, drawing its main energy from local and regional groups while it works effectively in national and even international arenas, is a subject that can only be addressed at the organizing meeting next fall. But these issues are also occasions for intellectual vitality and organizational creativity. We urge all who share such concerns to join. ■

Harry C. Boyte is a member of the Interregional Committee, Chair, Office Committee, Committees of Correspondence. His last book is *Community Is Possible: Repairing America's Roots*.

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Can this tone of debate help build a popular movement?

By Diana Johnstone

CHARLENE SPRETNAK'S overreaction to a review by someone basically friendly to the Green movement only confirms my worst suspicions about weaknesses in political culture. Instead of accepting the fact of honest differences of opinion she flies into a rage of indignation against all the Philistines (thrown into the same pot for the occasion) who are persecuting the heralds of the new truth.

Is this the tone of debate that can build a great popular movement? Or of "good process"?

Privately, some German Greens (and not the least "holistic") criticize the Spretnak book as "too ideological." But that tendency gets far more out of hand in Harry

Boyte's piece. Perhaps the lessons of Nazism's distortion of "values" should not be just a German lesson but has universal validity.

I did not "excoriate" anybody, and certainly not (as Boyte writes) "for imagining that one could draw into a new American political movement ordinary Democrats and Republicans." On the contrary, I expressed misgivings about the suggestion that Greens might operate in the Republican Party, which is something quite different. And my suggestion that an American equivalent of the Green Party would draw in existing groups, such as the Citizens Party, etc., seems to have been thoroughly misunderstood.

May I recall my main point: that "holistic" politics, to be meaningful, should be able to recognize the contributions of varied political traditions and draw them together in a non-sectarian way. ■

Home Before Dark
By Susan Cheever
Houghton Mifflin Company,
243 pp., \$15.95

By Rachel Gorlin

I don't think I would have started this book if I had known where it was going to end, but having written it I know my father better than I ever did when he was alive.

—Susan Cheever, in her preface to *Home Before Dark*
She was a city child and knew about cocktails and hangovers.

—John Cheever, describing a young girl in "Sutton Place Story"

In one of John Cheever's more famous and disquieting stories of the early '50s, "The Enormous Radio," a couple finds their new radio transmitting the conversations of their neighbors in a New York City apartment building. They (over)hear arguments, physical fights, soliloquies and dialogs on hardship and depression—the private sorrows and ugliness of ordinary lives, both captivating and horrifying. Within a few days, Jim and Irene Wescott are overwhelmed by evidence that "life is too terrible, too sordid and awful"; their conversation begins to echo with the vituperation heard over the radio.

Like the Wescotts, readers of novelist Susan Cheever's memoir of her fiction-writing father are apt to feel themselves unwholesome eavesdroppers, simultaneously fascinated and repelled by *Home Before Dark*. As John Cheever's fiction did for a generation, *Home Before Dark* lays bare the nether world of the post-war American dream.

The ingredients are all there: struggles with alcoholism and psychiatry, the temptations of the flesh (both hetero- and homosexual), the placid suburban exterior and moral torment within. During Cheever's final illness there is even a hint of the supernatural in his spells of "otherness," uncontrollable flashes of memory to scenes from years before. Unsurprisingly, and somewhat disturbingly, John Cheever's life as pieced together by his daughter resembles a John Cheever story related by a writer of lesser gifts.

A personal odyssey.

John Cheever's personal odyssey from the South Shore of Boston to New York in the '30s and '40s, and finally to suburban Westchester, provides insight into the aspirations and conflicts of an entire generation. Cheever was born in 1912. His father, from a low branch on the illustrious Cheever family tree, lost most of his money in the Great Depression. John, taken out of private school, left home to make his own way in New York City shortly thereafter.

His mother supported the family after his father's financial reverses by running a gift shop, which, according to John, was a humiliation from which the elder Cheever never recovered. John's unresolved hostility toward women, coupled with a driving need for their affection, crept in and out of his fiction and, apparently, his relationships, for the rest of his life.

By the mid-'30s, John Cheever was making a living as a writer. He was published in *The New Yorker* and *The New Republic*, where Malcolm Cowley introduced him to the bohemian literati. Though John and his beloved older brother Fred had attended meetings of the John Reed Club in Boston, he seems to have steered clear of all but the social life of the New York left. The Federal Writers Project kept him busy for a year working on their New York City



Home Before Dark

Guide. Cheever married, entered the army (he never saw combat, a great regret) and in 1943 became the father of Susan. The family moved to Manhattan's east fifties after the war, an area then in the nether world between Park Avenue and working-class drabness, where John struggled at the typewriter to keep their foothold on prosperity.

Finally, after the birth of their first son, city living quarters were too cramped. The Cheevers made the inevitable move to suburbia. For 10 years the family rented a small house on a huge Westchester estate. As Susan Cheever points out perceptively, their proximity to the grandeur of an earlier era, without actually being part of it, fit her father's self-image perfectly.

In 1960, after John's novel *The Wapshot Chronicle* met with critical and financial success, the Cheevers bought a house in an affluent Westchester suburb. They moved to Ossining, home of the infamous Sing-Sing prison, located opposite the commuter train station that seems ubiquitous in Cheever's writing. With beautiful estates cheek by jowl with a notorious prison, society's rewards and punishments were manifest in Ossining, the town where John Cheever spent the final 20 years of his life.

Greater professional recognition coincided with a worsening of Cheever's drinking problem and increased marital discord. As the '60s wore on, the fictional suburb in which Cheever set much of his work underwent a transformation from "Shady Hill" to "Bullet Park," mirroring his darkening vision. Some of his most brilliant stories (like "The Music Teacher" and "Metamorphoses") end with violent deaths.

The critics weren't comfortable in 1969 when his third novel, *Bullet Park*, came out. Its depiction of moral and spiritual chaos beneath the veneer of upper-middle-

class hegemony was out of sync with the flamboyant chaos of "liberation" championed by the "counterculture" in the late '60s. (In an interesting nod toward the new generation, Cheever dedicated *Bullet Park* to Susan and her then-husband, Robert Cowley, son of his old mentor and friend Malcolm.)

Women and drink.

In the mid-'70s, Cheever stopped drinking altogether after several years of very little writing and a great deal of womanizing, travel and desperation. Susan does not make this absolutely clear, but it seems that as he came to terms with his alcoholism he also came to terms with his sexual attraction toward men. In the last six years before he died in 1982, John Cheever had several affairs with men, including a long-lasting liaison with a man Susan calls "Rip" who became her father's assistant and a virtual member of the family. Cheever had a horror of effeminacy and the gay community as he saw it, though he wrote several tender love scenes between men in *Falconer*, his 1977 novel about a middle-aged drug addict in jail for the murder of his brother. Susan writes that despite having been told by her brother of her father's relationships while he was still alive, she really did not believe what she'd heard until she read her father's journals after his death.

John Cheever's bisexuality is probably one of the reasons Susan writes in her preface that she did

not think she would have started *Home Before Dark* had she known where it was going to end. Susan's discomfort is never articulated, but for those like Susan who came of age in the '60s and '70s the hell of desire as long repressed as Cheever's was almost unfathomable. She mentions that her father's great talent as a writer came from his "intense concentration on what you can see and hear and smell and touch.... He focused on the surface and texture of life, not on the emotions and motives underneath." For most of his life, those subterranean motivations were too difficult to take on; Cheever's genius lay in his ability to show what havoc these un-

Fathers and daughters of John and Susan Cheever's era seem to have disappointed one another in some fundamental way.

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acknowledged but ever-present
desires wreak in people's lives.

For all the pain John Cheever seems to have visited on his family through years of drinking, tension and argument, his daughter has written a remarkably even-tempered remembrance. The tone of *Home Before Dark* is almost dispassionate, not unlike many of her father's short stories. But every time she quotes from his voluminous journals her prose pales in comparison—a comparison that is unfair yet unavoidable.

Susan seems to share her father's sense of family best expressed in this passage from his story "Goodbye, My Brother": "I am happy to recall that I am a Pommeroy [read 'Cheever']. I don't say this because I am interested in family history or because this sense of uniqueness is deep or important to me but in order to advance the point that we are loyal to one another in spite of our differences, and that any rupture in this loyalty is a source of confusion and pain."

What does that loyalty imply in John Cheever's world if not a genial hypocrisy at times? Susan's values, befitting her times, are different. In *Home Before Dark* Susan Cheever exposes some of her father's rearrangements of the truth in family history and professional anecdote. From his journal: "I have been a storyteller since the beginning of my life, rearranging facts in order to make them more interesting and sometimes more significant. I have turned my eccentric old mother into a woman of wealth and position and made my father a captain at sea. I have improvised a background for myself—genteel, traditional—and it is generally accepted."

Fathers and daughters of John and Susan Cheever's era seem to have disappointed one another in some fundamental way, their expectations out of kilter with what society has demanded from them. The demands of the Depression, WWII and the post-war economy have helped make honesty and openness elusive to many fathers. Unconflicted "gaiety" and ease have been put out of their daughters' reach by the women's movement's reinterpretation of centuries of history. Under the circumstances, Susan Cheever has taken her knowledge of her father's world as far as it will go. Writer John Cheever was his own most successful character. Henceforth, novelist Susan has got to conjure up her own. ■

Rachel Gorlin is a New York-based freelance writer who writes regularly for *In These Times*.



A 1931 passport photo of writer John Cheever

Home Before Dark

By Pat Aufderheide

Editor's note: With this issue, *In These Times* begins a new bi-weekly column. Media Beat will report on current events in popular culture, whether it's new TV programs or changes in regulations that affect what's on TV, whether it's multimillion-dollar movies or pilot projects in people's video. Media Beat will both signal upcoming topics and provide updates. If you have an item for Media Beat, we encourage you to send it along to *In These Times*.

Sexual Fascism

Almost 12 years before director Sam Peckinpah's death this December, Pauline Kael wrote his obituary, in a review of his last stunning film, *Straw Dogs*. In films like *The Wild Bunch* and *Major Dundee*, he had already become a director of the mythic Western. He went on to make films like *Convoy* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, inadvertent and ever-more grotesque parodies of his macho style.

With her analysis of *Straw Dogs*, Kael offered an understanding of his dark importance as an American director working with themes of sexual anxiety and violence. Calling him "an artist in conflict with himself, but unmistakably and prodigally an artist, who uses images of great subtlety and emotional sophistication," she went on to call the movie the story of an academic's rampage against thugs who rape his wife, a "fascist classic." "The movie taps a sexual fascism—that is what machismo is—that is so much a part of the folklore that it's on the underside of many an educated consciousness and is rampant among the uneducated," she explained. "Violence is erotic in the movie because a man's prowess is in fighting and loving. The one earns him the right to the other."

Kael understood Peckinpah, whose films won fascinated and enthusiastic audiences, as someone who had the gift to understand a fantasy basic to this culture, and also as someone who revelled in "an aesthetic of cruelty." The review, collected in her *Deeper into Movies*, bears rereading on the occasion of his death, in part because the cultural vein he mined is still rich, and in part because the article exemplifies the best in socially conscious film criticism.

Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture

It may be hard to imagine how a novel written in the form of letters can turn into a movie, but Universal Studios is going to try with Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Rumors have it that Stephen Spielberg is interested. Meanwhile, the late Philip K. Dick, a brilliant and mordant science fiction writer whose worst nightmares seem to be coming true (one of his novels features an eternal media president, who only exists on the TV screen), is the subject of several film projects. *The Man in the High Castle* and *A Scanner Darkly* are two of the five Dick works under option. His *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, a novel he claimed was provoked by the inhumanity of the American role in Vietnam, was turned into the film *Blade Runner*, not much to his liking.

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And Now the Post-Modern Family

A new sitcom is coming out in 1985, from the folks who brought you "The Brady Bunch" and "Diff'rent Strokes." In the lead of this state-of-the-art sitcom is a robot in the shape of a little girl, the invention of a computer whiz who installs the "child identicant" (a term lifted from sci-fi master Philip K. Dick himself) as a member of his family. Called "Small Wonder," the show may be the first TV program to make the silicon chip the center of family life.

Free Enterprise for Some

When the FCC last year tried to lift the restriction that broadcasters can own only seven TV or radio stations, Hollywood producers successfully blocked the ruling. The producers, which sell most of the programs on TV to the networks, claimed it would make the networks all-powerful and eliminate diversity. Now the FCC has struck a compromise among the big-time interests involved, ruling that the companies can own up to 12 TV stations or reach 25 percent of the viewing audience, whichever comes first. Even though a clause favors minority ownership, the rule does not bode well for those truly interested in media diversity. Many suspect that the ruling will not affect the holdings of the biggest companies, but will increase the holdings of the second tier of multiple owners. They foresee medium-sized markets as the new targets for group owners.

The CIA Cries: "Unfair!"

In the dark days of December, two CIA officers strode in to the Federal Communications Commission's Fairness Doctrine division and filed a complaint against the ABC-TV network. The Fairness Doctrine requires fair coverage of controversial issues on the air, and

the CIA claims that it was maligned during a broadcast in which a witness claimed that the CIA had tried to recruit him to kill a Hawaiian investment banker.

Even though the broadcast included the CIA's denial, the agency still charges the broadcast was "virtually, totally false and misleading." ABC says the complaint "raises serious and disturbing First Amendment concerns," and the network is getting support from an unlikely quarter: the Media Access Project. The public interest law firm has been a long-time supporter of the Fairness Doctrine, as a crucial tool for public interest advocates against both corporate-produced news and corporate advertising campaigns. But this time, said MAP head Andrew Schwartzman, "We had to reverse our position."

He claims the complaint is an abuse of the Doctrine, which was not designed to protect government agencies from scrutiny. "Our concern is to increase the amount of information to the public and to stimulate debate, and the CIA is interested in shutting down debate," he explained. The FCC is letting the complaint cool off for a few weeks.

Blacks Talk Back to the Screen

The debut issue of *Black Film Review*, an occasional newsletter (110 S St., NW, Washington, DC 20001) offers a survey of black stereotypes in this year's Christmas releases from Hollywood, and critic David Nicholson also notes of *Beverly Hills Cop*, the season's biggest hit: "One of last year's most bizarre phenomena was the embracing of pop culture heroes by conservatives. Columnist George Will, after attending a Bruce Springsteen concert, was moved to extoll Springsteen as an example of what was right about young America."

"Now comes the *Washington Times*' John Podhoretz on Eddie

Murphy," Nicholson continues. "Podhoretz writes that Murphy is terrific, not because he is black but because he is terrific. Of course, Murphy is a very funny man. But I found it significant that the fight scene with Nick Nolte in *48 Hours* ends with Murphy getting sucker punched."

"The problem, I think, is the one Pauline Kael noted in the *New Yorker*: Eddie Murphy doesn't play black people. He plays black people as white people think they are. And he still hasn't made a really good movie. Only time will tell whether he matures and comes into his own. Or whether, like

Richard Pryor, he will have to play a slave (see *The Toy*) in order to play Hollywood. Perhaps Podhoretz should see Murphy's concert tape to find out what Murphy really thinks about Ronald Reagan."

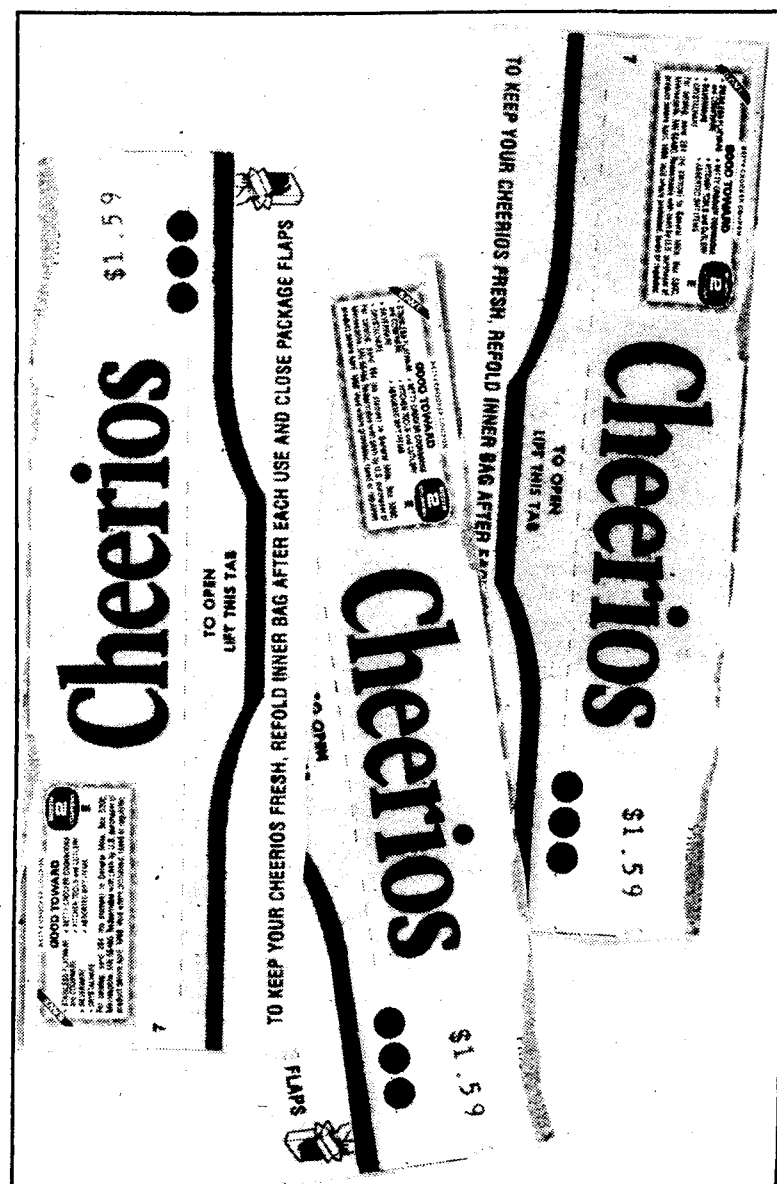
Shame of the Marketeers

When NBC scheduled a documentary that dealt frankly with sexual abuse of children and child pornography, advertisers quietly skulked away. The network could not find one sponsor for a show that advertisers thought the public might find offensive. So the network filled commercial time on "The Silent Shame" with in-house ads. No sooner had the program aired in August, however, than requests for the transcript came pouring in, and within three months NBC logged more than 7,000 queries. After available copies of the program had been distributed free to concerned groups, NBC (at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, NY 10020) prepared a brochure on the issue. If advertisers missed out, executive producer Tom Tamizawa says some viewers were grateful they did. "We actually got letters congratulating us on being so classy as to run the show without ads," he said.

Support Public TV, Eat Breakfast Cereal

In the constant search for ways to keep public television alive in an era of declining federal funding, New York station WNET has signed a deal with General Foods. The company will contribute funds to public TV in proportion to the number of boxtops that breakfast cereal consumers clip and mail, in a promotion for PBS' "The Sporting Life." Broadcasters like the, uh, dough, but they're embarrassed about the image. As senior producer Robert Kotlowitz put it, "It probably is beneath our dignity, but it's worth the try" to interest corporations in keeping a public service going.

— ©Pat Aufderheide, 1985



Councils

Continued from page 3

employed groups that can't succeed." According to Watkins, many council leaders have "no clear understanding of how to set up a viable committee, build leadership or acquire necessary resources."

Her comments are echoed by Allen Fishbien, who works with the Washington-based Center for Community Change. "There is a great need to develop in these emerging councils proper administrative capacity in order to survive and be meaningful." For those councils lacking in organizational ability and talent, every day is a challenge.

For those that are well established, such as PUP and Mon Valley, the challenges are still there but so is the funding and organizing experience. PUP's nine-year history is replete with triumphs that range from forcing the creation of 600 new good-paying jobs at the local post office to coordinating the campaign that enabled Philadelphia to become the first municipality in the nation with a plant-closing ordinance.

PUP Director John Dodds knows from experience what it takes to organize the unemployed. "The unemployed don't just spring into action—they're organized to act. The unemployed are a powerless group, so they need an organization to keep them mobilized."

Dodds believes that to be effective today's unemployed councils "need to organize the unemployed as recent members of the middle class" and to budget many years to the process—because success will not be achieved overnight.

Although the more recently formed councils such as those in Youngstown, Ohio, Oil City, Pa., and Asbury Park, N.J., are still in the early building stages, the NUN leadership is trying to close the instruction and guidance gap that existed over the past year. One such successful effort was the Second Annual Conference of the National Unemployed Network, held at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pa., in August.

Another measure of leadership commit-

ment is the effort by Dodds and other organizers to travel the unemployed circuit and advise the still emerging committees.

Despite the impressive accomplishments of today's unemployed councils, they are still a long way from attaining the stature and impact of their organizational ancestors in the '30s.

Allen Hornblum is research director of the Philadelphia Unemployment Project.

Priest

Continued from page 16

camps after World War II. And I have been kicked out of my own land, I have suffered persecutions and slaughter in other Arab states. And I am the threat to the Jews?"

True, he admits, some Palestinians have learned the "international language of failure," that of violence. But more impressive to him is that so many have not. He sees his work as maintaining a culture that can act for peace, not react in kind to aggression. He worries about learning by example, pointing out that Palestinian terrorism became a fact in the wake of the Six Day War.

If the violent image of Palestinians is shaped by Jewish Israeli fear, it is also a popular international stereotype. Chacour hopes that Americans who read *Blood Brothers* will meet another kind of Palestinian, the ordinary villager who believes that a humane relationship in a land with a legacy of cultural pluralism is still possible. He has seen that insight dawn on Westerners, in tours he organizes for Europeans and Americans of Arab villages in Israel. "They get together at the end of a day in the village," he says, "and they tell me with amazement, 'Everyone was so nice to me!'"

On this visit to the U.S., the latest of several, Chacour has seen much that could lead to despair of insight at any level, much less reconciliation. He has confronted the familiar unblinking support of the American government for Israel, and he has seen the support for Israel offered by fundamentalist Christian churches prophesying the imminent arrival of Armageddon in the Middle East—a prophecy that President

Reagan is rumored to take seriously. "Poor Mr. Reagan," says Chacour. "I pity him. I believe that we are not allowed to sit on the throne of God and interpret history."

"These emotional interpretations of the Bible can be dangerous," he warns. "We Christians can easily become our own enemies."

Most impressive to him, for a nation that devotes some \$7 or \$8 million a day in tax dollars to support Israel, is the casual ignorance among ordinary Americans about the human drama of Palestinian life. The same symptoms of social illness he sees among Israelis crop up here too.

"That lack of trust—even paranoia," he says. "Your system seems to foster it. Frankly, to me you seem like crazy people, running from here to there, never simply living. This is not a human society to me, but a consumer society. Your children are a burden to you, your old people you put out of sight in old people's buildings."

So unlettered Palestinian villagers, he thinks, may even have something to teach Americans—if they want to learn. "But the problem is that people here must be willing to change themselves, not just to give charity to others. We do not need that, and we do not ask it. We need our dignity, our own self-respect. And so do you."

Perhaps, he suggests, it is pervasive in-

IN THESE TIMES JAN. 16-22, 1985 security that leads Westerners to place their trust in the wrong things, especially military strength. He finds that ominous, because he believes the state of Israel is an incontestable fact, and is therefore concerned with its overall quality of life. (He keeps a special irritated impatience in reserve for those who dedicate their energy to arguing whether or not Israel ought to exist.)

The price of trust in military strength is too high, not only in economic but also in social terms: "Israel is not secure now, and it can never be secure so long as the Israelis depend on military repression. Their future is not there. The future is in my hands, in the creation of a way of life that gives me respect."

Chacour can see how large the problems are, and knows there will be no easy solutions. Lacking a large-scale plan, he tackles projects he can do himself. A few summer camps, a shelf full of library books, a guided tour of neighboring villages, a sermon, a meeting with an American bishop—none of these acts, he thinks, adds up to much. But the alternative is unbearable.

"My optimism," he explains, "lies in this: that my people are still alive. And as long as there is one olive tree left alive in Galilee, I will continue to hope."

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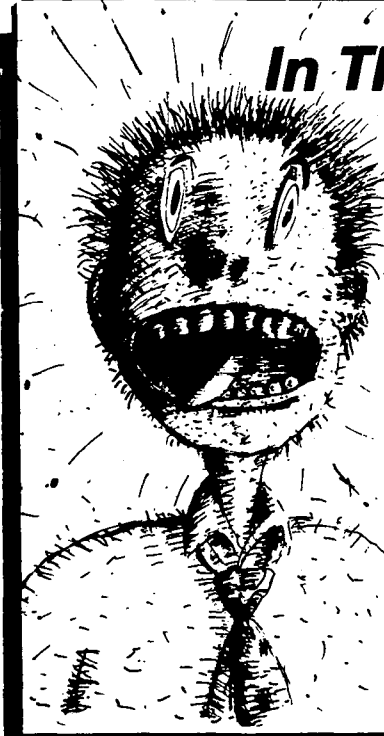
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By Pat Aufderheide

Hatred is the real enemy



I HAVE LEARNED A LESSON FROM being a victim of violence," says Father Elias Chacour. "Hatred corrupts." Chacour was only a child when, in 1948, his family was expelled from their small village in Galilee. He doesn't hate the Jewish soldiers who moved into his house, leaving his family to sleep under their own olive trees before being moved on. He doesn't hate the Jewish farmer who hired his family to harvest what had once been their own olives. And he especially doesn't hate the thousands of Jewish settlers on the West Bank who soberly discuss building enclaves to hold in the more than one million Arab Palestinians who were already living there.

He is spending his time instead restoring a sense of elementary human dignity to the people of his homeland—whatever their background. His efforts are as small as visiting a Palestinian parishioner who is sick, or as ambitious as organizing summer camps where 5,000 Palestinian children

live with each other for three weeks, learning names of other villages and sleeping under olive trees planted by their ancestors.

He has established eight community centers where shattered social links are mended, founded secondary schools to keep villages from becoming storehouses for the aged rather than living communities, arranged Jewish-Palestinian encounters and fueled small libraries with books to educate the young.

And now he has written a book that he hopes will be read in libraries wherever there are Palestinians—that is to say, all over the world. The book is *Blood Brothers* (Chosen Books, Lincoln, VA 22078), written with David Hazard. His own life story, it could easily have been the tale of a victim; in part, it is a record of horror and struggle. But it is also a remarkable record of a person who practices a faith in God that is also an exercise of faith in human beings. The book takes him from a refugee childhood to young adulthood among liberation-theology-minded seminarians in France back to

the villages of his youth, where his grassroots work often raises eyebrows of church officials as well as of state bureaucrats.

What might seem quixotic if noble missionary activity looks to Chacour like responsible exercise of strength. He explains why during a Washington, D.C., stop on a November tour of several U.S. cities. He is convinced that the seemingly powerless Arab Palestinians in Israel, about a fifth of whom are Christians, are a repository of hope for Israel's future.

Their strength, he argues, is that of the spirit in a country where the dominant culture—shaped by Western values alien to the territory—appears afflicted by a terrible disease, that of insecurity and distrust. He understands the way that 20th-century holocaust has bred that attitude in Jews, but he knows as well that the solution is not for Palestinians to take the place of Jews in a cruel diaspora. Far from it: Palestinian self-consciousness, he can see, has broken down ancient social divisions in the last three decades, and created a new reality

as firm as the existence of the Israeli state.

These self-conscious Palestinians, to Jewish Israelis, are a problem. To Chacour they are part of the solution, one whose terms are all written down in the Sermon on the Mount. "I am much more powerful in Israel than the Jew," he says. The little cross on his lapel glints, but does not distract from his intense, dark-eyed gaze. "I have no weapons. I speak for reconciliation. I am morally much healthier. It is sad to see some of our young Jewish soldiers, who are wounded and scarred by the blood on their hands."

He describes a raging illness at the heart of Israeli society, evidenced in the fear that Jews in and outside Israel have of Palestinians. If he used the Western language of psychoanalysis, he would call it projection. "Let us look back. Who is the threat to whom? I was there on the land for thousands of years. I was there to receive Abraham when he came out of Iraq. I welcomed the remnants of the concentration

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